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BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, AND INTERRELIGIOUS STUDIES MEDIA

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THE JOURNAL OF INTERRELIGIOUS STUDIES

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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Axel M. Oaks Takacs

50 issues. That is how many the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* has published since its founding in 2009 as the *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue*—including this one.

More than 17 years later, the JIRS has grown to be among the most well-known scholarly, peer-reviewed publications for interfaith/interreligious studies and its related and adjacent disciplines. Thanks to the support of multiple institutions, we have managed to remain open-access, granting our peer-reviewed articles, scholarly reflections, and book reviews extensive reach beyond the academy—beyond the restrictions of subscription-based models, too.

The JIRS's parent organization, Interreligious Studies Media, has enabled further growth and reach. For example, beginning with our last issue, print versions (paperbacks) of all issues will soon be available for purchase on our website (check www.interreligiousstudies.org for updates).

This issue is a special issue on the research project, “Co-Produced Religions,” whose principal investigators are Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg.¹ In January of 2024, the JIRS hosted a webinar, inviting Heyden, Nirenberg, and several of the project's post-doctoral fellows to present some of the findings of the research relevant to theology. Several theologians and historians unaffiliated with the project then responded.² In conversation with Heyden and Nirenberg, I decided to publish a special issue on this topic. Their paper, “When Theology and History Think Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” became the central piece to which other theologians or historians of theology would respond. The product is this special issue that features their primary essay followed by three articles engaging their work in contexts outside of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic context of the Mediterranean basin and Arabian Peninsula. In fact, that was the intention, viz., to test their theses in other religious and geographical contexts.

1 See <https://coproduced-religions.org>.

2 Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lbmz4j3oXOY>.

Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg's essay, "When Theology and History Think Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," lays out the core argument of the Co-Produced Religions project. They propose that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are "historical religions" whose theologies and self-definitions have been continually formed through their entangled histories, rival claims to a shared prophetic past, and mutual imaginings. They show how historical interpretation has functioned both as critique and as a generative theological resource, and they invite theologians and historians to cultivate "eschatological humility" as they engage this shared archive in the present.

Adriana Tunliu's "*Lego-lego* and the Co-production of Religion: Orality, Performance, and Decolonial Agency in Eastern Indonesia" tests Heyden and Nirenberg's Religious Co-Production framework in the Alor-Pantar archipelago. Focusing on the Indigenous mass dance *Lego-lego*—with its *pantun adat*, moko drums, and communal choreography—Tunliu shows how Islam, Christianity, and local traditions are continually co-produced through shared ritual, oral poetry, and kinship rather than primarily through texts.

Billy J. Zorinthara's "Interposed Christology and Primal Sacrifices: Christianity Encountering the Mizo Tribe in India" extends the co-production conversation into the encounter between Christianity and Mizo primal religion (*sakhua*) in Northeast India. In this setting, interaction is largely unidirectional—Christian theology reshaping primal frameworks—thus testing and nuancing Heyden and Nirenberg's theory of co-production outside the Abrahamic, text-centric context

Lailatul Fitriyah and Indah Roziah Cholilah's "Power Structure, Hegemony, and Marginalization in a Case of Religious Co-Production" moves Heyden and Nirenberg's framework into contemporary East Java. Through ethnographic attention to Sapta Darma—an Indigenous "ancestral religion" not formally recognized by the Indonesian state—and its relations with state-acknowledged Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism in the village of Sukoreno, they show how religious co-production unfolds in everyday embodied life, under conditions of legal categorization, "delimited pluralism," and majority-minority dynamics.

In addition, two "rolling submissions" articles, unrelated to the special issue topic, are included as part of this issue. Sana Tayyen's article, "Ghazali and Aquinas for a Posthumous Dialogue on the Possibility of an Eternally Created World," offers a rich exercise in comparative medieval theology and philosophy. Pravina Rodrigues's article, "The Logistics of Faith and Reason in Anselm and Ādi Śaṅkara: A Hindu-Christian Comparative Theological

Inquiry,” probes how “faith seeking understanding” functions in both medieval Christian and Advaita Vedānta frameworks.

This issue and its distribution would have not come together without the proficient and superb work of Lydia Bremer-McCollum (Assistant Editor), Sze-Long A. Wong (Design and Production Editor), Mark Spinnenweber (Graduate Research Fellow), and Aubrey Chavez (Social Media and Website Manager). My sincere gratitude is extended to all of them.

Axel M. Oaks Takacs, Th.D.
Editor-in-Chief
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ARTICLE

When Theology and History Think Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg

Abstract

This article explores the mutual co-production of theology and history within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, themselves co-produced religions. Theology, understood as constructive thinking about God, has long drawn on historical claims to refine religious self-understanding, while modern historical research has often deconstructed such claims. We argue, however, that history not only destabilizes theological narratives but also generates constructive theological possibilities. By tracing how each tradition re-interprets its own past and that of the others, we show that history has functioned as a shared theological resource across these religions, such that they can be understood as “historical religions.” Through examples such as the transmission of Josephus’ *Jewish War* and its Christian, Muslim, and Jewish re-appropriations, we illustrate how interpretive struggles over the past have shaped overlapping visions of revelation, authority, and hope. These dynamics reveal that the three religions cannot be adequately understood in isolation, as their self-definitions and theologies of history emerge through rivalry, borrowing, and mutual imagination. Recognizing this shared archive of co-production challenges segregated historical and theological approaches while opening new possibilities for engagement. We further suggest that thinking about these traditions as historical religions points to the existential significance of time, in which past, present, and future are constantly reconfigured in relation to the eternal. Attending to their interdependence can cultivate both critical care and constructive

creativity, fostering humility before the diversity of the archive and hope for renewed theological reflection in interreligious thought today.

Keywords

history, theology, co-production, historical religion, temporality, hope, humility, Hodgson, Josephus-Yosippon, Jerusalem, supersession, epistemic humility, Abrahamic religions, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, comparative theology, historical theology, interfaith relations

Introduction*

Within a given tradition of the three religions that concern us here, theology—by which we mean all constructive thinking about God—is often pursued with the idea of improving that tradition or at least adapting it to present need. In such theology, engagements with the past (“history”) can be simultaneously critical and constructive, aimed at unfolding the best a given tradition has to offer, or at purifying it of elements that the theologian considers not being part of the “essence” of their own religion. The guiding paradigm of historical thinking within a specific religious tradition is in many cases development, genealogy, purification, or refinement through continuous engagement with the past.

Modern historical research, on the other hand, generally questions such narratives of development, pointing to the diverse and even contradictory

* This essay is a fruit of conversations between the two authors and discussions with members of the research initiative “CORE. Coproduced Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam,” launched in 2022 (for more information about the project see: www.coproduced-religions.org). On occasion, the essay draws on scholarly work we pursued individually before we became aware of our shared interest in the intersection of history and theology in the study of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and their interrelations. For the sake of brevity, we will not indicate every such instance in the footnotes here, and in any case our understanding of that previous work has also been transformed by the collaboration. Our thanks go to Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, the organizer of a webinar in January 2024 and editor of this special issue, and to our colleagues for their responses to an earlier draft of this paper. We are also grateful to the two anonymous readers for their valuable feedback and especially for inviting us to engage more deeply with comparative theology. We would also like to thank Carson Bay, David Gyllenhall, Lea Schlenker and Shlomo Zuckier for their help with sources and references, and Shlomo Zuckier for his careful copy-editing.

nature of the many and varied forms of life and thought within a given religious tradition. Historical research in this sense has primarily served as an invaluable form of critique vis-à-vis historically formulated claims for the justification of normative theological thinking. In recent decades, interest in interactions between Jews, Christians, and Muslims has provided yet another challenge to traditional narratives of development in which each tradition appears, after some initial “parting of the ways,” to flow through time independently of the others, restoring instead a sense of their ongoing interdependence over the course of their entangled histories.¹

But the constructive potentials of historical research for theology have rarely been articulated or pursued by modern academic historians. Even more rarely does anyone—whether academic historian or theologian—ask what potentials the shared and competing history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam can offer contemporary religious thought, not least at a time (modernity and post-modernity) when comprehensive conceptions of salvation history have become questionable within each religious tradition. There have certainly been numerous efforts toward interreligious understanding. But these often manifest a desire either to leave behind a past understood as conflict-laden, or to uncover a less-conflictual past that can be anointed as normative.² Both approaches, however well-intentioned, seem to us profoundly ahistorical.

1 On the debate about the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity see James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (SCM Press, 2006 [1991]); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 95 (Mohr Siebeck, 2003). For an adaptation of this debate to early Islam, see Ikka Lindstedt, “Surah 5 of the Qur’an: The Parting of the Ways?” *Journal of Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies* 3 (2024): 81–112.

2 We see a desire to leave behind the past, for example, in comparative theology as presented in Marianne Moyaert, “An Introduction to Christian-Jewish Comparative Theology,” in *A Companion to Comparative Theology*, ed. Tim Valkenberg (Brill, 2022), 111–131. Referring to Christian Anti-Judaism Moyaert writes: “Comparative theology resolves to break with this hegemonic past of Christianity but also makes this resolution concrete in how it brings different traditions together” (121). We also recognize the hope to overcome the conflict-laden past in the intense reception of Martin Buber’s dialogical philosophy among Christian and Jewish thinkers over the past decades, or in the more recent notion of a singular “Abrahamic faith” among Muslim and Christian theologians. The desire to uncover the past as exemplary for interfaith relations, on the other hand, can be seen in the attempts to understand medieval Spain as a space of convivencia, as in Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Little, Brown and Co., 2002), and many others.

We suggest here a simultaneously critical and constructive view of what history and theology can mutually offer each other when thinking together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as co-produced religions. By “co-produced” religions we mean that these traditions, in all their sectarian variety, have always formed, reformed, and transformed themselves through interacting with, thinking about and imagining each other, and continue to do so.³ This enduring co-dependence derives from two basic facts. The first is their shared reservoir and competing canon of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives. The second, more often forgotten, is that the historical as a mode of knowledge has itself proven fundamental to each of the three religions not only at their origins, but in every moment of their existence.

Historian as Theologian, Theologian as Historian

Among the modern academic historians who suggested that the proximity of history and theology could be a fruitful one was the Islamicist Marshall Hodgson, in his as yet unpublished lecture “The Historian as Theologian.”⁴ There he defined the historian as someone who “studies persons’ responses to commitments in cultural traditions,” and the theologian as one who “studies a particular tradition of commitment to ultimate life orientation ... so as to refine the tradition of life-orientation itself.”⁵ In that essay Hodgson spoke of Islam, Christianity and Judaism as “the ‘kerygmatic’ life-orientational traditions—those that call for ultimate commitment on the

3 See Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, “Co-produced religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” *Harvard Theological Review* 118 (2025): 159–180.

4 Marshall Hodgson, “The Historian as Theologian,” transcript of a lecture given at a Wednesday evening seminar on religion in the intellectual life in Chicago, January 18th, 1967. See, Marshall G. S. Hodgson Papers, Box 1, Folder 18, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. For a more extended treatment of this lecture see David Nirenberg, “The Historian as Theologian: A Conflict of the Faculties?,” in *Claiming History in Religious Conflicts*, ed. Adrian Brändli and Katharina Heyden, *Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana* 39 (Schwabe 2021), 335–351.

5 These definitions appear in Hodgson, “The Historian as Theologian,” 1–2. Compare 24–25: “The *theologian* studies a particular tradition of commitment to ultimate life-orientation (that is, normally, his own), so as to criticize in broader perspective any individual efforts that are made to express that tradition itself; and so he increases the self-awareness of that tradition.” “The *historian* studies traditions of cultural commitment generally and so criticizes and refines our awareness of their implications; and so, in this respect, he contributes to the self-awareness not just of one tradition but of all the traditions that he is dealing with; or, collectively, the historians contribute to the self-awareness of all traditions. This is largely a collective work.”

plane of the historical.”⁶ By ultimate commitment he meant that in these traditions, what happens in a particular moment understood as historical—the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, the crucifixion of Jesus or the conquest of Jerusalem, the Battle of the Ditch or of Karbala, but potentially also every action by an individual—transforms the possibilities for the orientation of life in every present, and that every act or event or world image that is produced by or responds to such commitment in that present will be irreversibly relevant in the ultimate future of the Last Judgement. He called this dynamic the “kerygmatic mode,” and offered as example “when, in response to a revelatory moment, the environment, particularly historical society as it is and is about to be, is seen as radically other than what it appears, and the individual is challenged to find fresh ways to respond to its reality.”⁷

Hodgson held that it was the Israelites who had invented this sense of the historical, and that of these three religions in the Middle Ages, it was Islam that had most developed it. We are skeptical of these specific views, and we do not find helpful the (implicitly Christian) vocabulary of kerygma. But we sympathize with the central claim that “the study of history may turn out to be essential in helping us to work through, in this dimension of our spiritual life, to something more adequate than we have been able to discover so far.”⁸ We would go further: one need not possess a spiritual life or consider oneself a believer to recognize that the study of the past of these three faiths (history) has potential to shape present and future thinking about God in these faiths (theology). At its simplest, our argument is that, regardless of intentions, historical research creates constructive theological potentials as well as “de-constructive” critical ones, and that historians and theologians both should cultivate an awareness of those potentials.

Indeed among the things that such cultivation can teach us is that our most “critical” philosophies of history are not independent of theologies. For example, Hodgson himself insisted that one of the central attributes of the historical in these three religions was the replacement of cyclical notions of

6 Hodgson, “The Historian as Theologian,” 2.

7 Hodgson, “The Historian as Theologian,” 28. On the use of kerygma in the 1960s see Claude H. Thompson, *Theology of the Kerygma; A Study in Primitive Preaching* (Prentice-Hall, 1962), 2, who defined it as a situation in which sacral and historical time are conflated and “the past is contemporized.” Hodgson adopts the term in *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (The University of Chicago Press, 1974). He defined it as a piety “focused on history,” and asserted that medieval “Islamic piety reflected a strong historical consciousness that was becoming rare then in non-Muslim traditions” (vol. 1: 362).

8 Hodgson, “The Historian as Theologian,” 34 (compare p. 3).

action in time with an irreversible directionality to history. “Once people say that human beings have one life apiece and are not reborn; ... that there is one world history which has a beginning and an end [...]; [that] what happens at this [i.e. any particular given] moment is going to determine the ultimate future in the Last Judgement forever, and can never be erased again—you begin to get a feeling for the nature of your temporality, which ... you can’t really escape.”⁹ He understood this sense of the historical as having conquered the world, first with the rise of Christianity and Islam, and then with the spread of secularized philosophies of history, especially Marxism.

We agree with Hodgson (and many others) that modern and secular philosophies of history like those of Marx, as well as those of Hegel, Kant, and other “critical” Enlightenment thinkers upon which Marx drew, can and should be understood as themselves deeply nourished and shaped by earlier theologies of history. But rather than understanding the directionality and irreversibility of these theologies and philosophies of history as an Israelite invention that then conquered the world (as Hodgson and many others have done), we see this view of history as itself co-produced among these three religions.

To offer an obvious instance: after Nebuchadnezzar’s conquests of Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE, the Israelite tradition developed an understanding of the history of Israel as a series of repeating cycles of transgression and repentance, stressing the ongoing potential for restoration. After the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE, an early Christian effort to deprive Judaism of any hopes of restoration rejected such an understanding. It offered instead a supersession, an irreversible rupture in the flow of prophetic time with the birth and the crucifixion of Jesus, made visible in the ruins of a Temple that could never be restored. From a Christian point of view the Jews now stood—to put it in terms any present-day neo-Hegelian would understand—“on the wrong side of history.” For their part, many Jewish writers continued to stress the ongoing power of repentance to reverse divine decrees, as is amply clear from numerous rabbinic traditions, not to mention some present-day Zionist movements.¹⁰

9 Hodgson, “The Historian as Theologian,” 31–32.

10 Rabbinic thinkers often interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem as God’s punishment for Israel’s sins, but they also developed prayers for the Temple’s restoration, as in the concluding blessing of Avodah, “Blessed are you Lord, who returns His Presence to Zion.” They even speculated whether that restoration would occur in a righteous or unrighteous generation (b. Sanh. 98a). See generally Shaye J.D. Cohen, “The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash,” *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (1982): 18–39; and Robert Goldenberg, “The Destruction of the Jerusalem

But in worlds conquered first by Christian and later by Islamic histories, their voices were faint and minoritarian.

So we would not stress the “irreversibility” of history and assign to it a particular point of origin. Instead, we suggest that in these three religions and the cultures they have touched, the relationship between the interpretation of the past and what can be thought in the present and future is better and more fruitfully understood as an ever-present possibility of mutual transformation than as a relentlessly directional development. This is precisely why the historian and the theologian are so powerfully related and have much to learn from each other. Every present transforms the past through re-interpretation, and re-interpretation of the past transforms the possibilities of life in every present and future. Many revolutions in these faiths have presented themselves as the product of a “better” reading of divine teachings (theology) on historical or philological grounds. And each of these revolutions transformed the future possibilities for both theology and history.

Religious thinkers too have emphasized the constitutive importance of history for theological reflection in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In every period within these three faith traditions, the many normative efforts and claims of theologians to rediscover the “true,” “original,” or even “purified” meaning of revelation in the past and make it available to believers in their present have not only fostered religious diversity and differentiation, but also created tensions and conflicts within and between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. It is this constant re-formation and re-interpretation of the past and the re-evaluation of previous claims to revelation and its history that continuously transform the ways in which communities within these three religious traditions understand themselves and their relations to the others. The vast and even contradictory diversity of these self-understandings, each legitimated through an interpretation of a past understood as revelatory and

Temple: Its Meaning and its Consequences,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism, vol. IV: The Late Roman Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191–205. For the Avodah blessing see Yitz Landes, *Studies in the Development of Birkat Ha-Avodah* (Hebrew; Mandel Institute, 2018). For Jewish-Christian polemics about the destruction and its meaning see Adam Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins of the Temple: Apologetics and Polemics in Early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 165 (Mohr Siebeck, 2016). Questions of irreversibility and abrogation (for example, of Mosaic law) are also central to Muslim-Jewish polemic. See, for example, Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmidtke, “A Jewish Refutation of Samaw’al al-Maghribi’s *Iḥām al-Yahūd*: An Annotated Translation,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 12 (2024): 1–44, section 2.1. The later example of *Yosippon* will be developed further below.

authoritative, cannot be exaggerated. The struggle over different views of the nature of history and of the possibilities for God's intervention in history has always been in these three religions a sectarian one. Powerful ideas about the directionality and irreversibility of history are a dominant product of that sectarian struggle, but far from the only one. Many other views can be found in the archives of the past, and in any event the struggle is ongoing. History has not come to an end.

What are Islam, Judaism, and Christianity? A Co-Produced Archive of Possibilities

For both historians and theologians, in their respective claims to the past, this factual diversity within each and across all these communities provokes the normative question: what is Christianity, what is Islam, what is Judaism? An example: in his book *What is Islam?*, the late Shahab Ahmed set out to demonstrate “the *prolific scale* of contradiction between the ideas, values, and practices that claim normative affiliation with ‘Islam,’ which poses the demanding problem of how to locate *the coherence of an internally-contradictory phenomenon*.”¹¹ Problem posed, he sought to solve it, not by dismissing one pole of a contradiction as either peripheral to Islam or as downright “un-Islamic,” but rather by formulating “a conceptualization of Islam as theoretical object that, by identifying the coherent dynamic of internal contradiction, enables us to comprehend the integrity and identity of the historical and human phenomenon at play.”¹²

Ahmed's Islam cannot be located in any specific normative content—not law, not the five pillars, not even the Islamic “creed,” or *shahada*. And yet he also insists that “out there in the world beyond the individual Muslim is something that this Muslim recognizes as Islam,” and that the two—individual Muslim and Islam “out there”—are “*co-constitutive*.”¹³ Where then, if not in normative content, does this Islam reside? Ahmed's answer turns out to be profoundly historical: Islam is the sum of everything that has ever been lived or experienced as Islamic. It is the hugely diverse aggregate of all previous Islamic experiences. It is through this vast archive of Islam past that every possible Islamic engagement with revelation gains meaning in every moment in time, every present and every future. What we call “archive”

11 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 109 (emphasis his).

12 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 109.

13 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 102.

Ahmed called the “Con-Text” within which the meaning of any possible Islam is produced: “*that whole field or complex or vocabulary of meanings of Revelation that have been produced in the course of human and historical hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, and which are thus already present as Islam*” in any given moment.¹⁴

We would add that the same is also true for Christianity and Judaism: they too are the totality-of everything that has ever been lived or thought or claimed to be Jewish or Christian. What Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are is defined by what any Christians, Jews, and Muslims have at any point experienced as or claimed to be Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. That might already strike some as a radical claim. And yet we are suggesting something even more radical. We argue that the history of these three faiths is a conjoint one, insofar as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have since their beginnings distinguished (and approximated) themselves from (and to) each other by making rival claims to what they understand to be a common prophetic origin and historical past.

Such rival claims already manifest themselves in the canonical scriptures of the three traditions. The metaphor of the sealing of prophecy, for example, appears already in the biblical Book of Daniel, with its proclamation of seventy weeks “to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy” (9:24). The Gospels put this to the work of developing a new historical perspective with their claim that all prophecy ends with John the Baptist (Luke 16:16), and that Jesus has come to “fulfill the law and the prophets” (Matthew 5:17). The first action of the resurrected Jesus, according to Luke, was to re-describe to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus all prophetic history, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets,” so that they could understand that all of it was about himself (Luke 24:13–27). In this recapitulation of the prophetic past we might see the birth of Christian historical theology based on Scripture. Some decades later, the Christian writer Tertullian would turn this argument against Judaism in his “*Adversus Iudaeos*,” interpreting Daniel 9:24 as referring prophetically to Jesus’ nativity.¹⁵

14 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 356 (emphasis his).

15 Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos* 8:11–15: “Therefore, since the prophecy was fulfilled through his advent, for that reason he said that ‘vision and prophecy were sealed’; inasmuch as he is the signet of all prophets, fulfilling all things which in days bygone they had announced of him. For, after the advent of Christ and his passion, there is no longer ‘vision or prophet’ to announce him as to come. In short, if this is not so, let the Jews exhibit, subsequently to Christ, any volumes of prophets, visible miracles wrought by any angels, (such as those) which in bygone days the patriarchs saw until the advent of Christ, who is now come [...]. Whence

The rabbis, for their part, understood prophecy to have ended during the early Second Temple period, before their own time and before that of Jesus. For them prophecy was a thing of the past, even if at times its distant echo could still be heard in a *bat kol*, or heavenly voice.¹⁶ This was not the approach that would be taken in the Qur'an, which directly challenged the Christian claim to finality and fulfillment by calling Muhammad the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*; al-Ahzab 33:40), and providing various lists of specific messengers who had preceded him and who were fulfilled by him (al-An'am 6:83–87; cf. Yunus 10:47).¹⁷ These include Moses and Jesus, placing both, together with many other prophets, within a cycle of hope for the fulfillment of prophecy that is now presented as coming to a close with this new and final revelation to the Arabs' Prophet.

Islam was not ignorant of the Christian hope for a second coming of Christ and could even adopt this hope as its own. Many traditions, for example, predict Jesus' return during the turbulent end times that will immediately precede final judgement. A number even assign to him a specific function: to defeat the Antichrist and kill the Jews who are his followers. But these traditions make it clear that when Jesus comes, he comes as a follower of Muhammad and upholds God's revelations to that

most firmly does he assert that his advent 'seals visions and prophecy.'" See *The Writings of Tertullianus*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and Sir James Donaldson, trans. Sydney Thelwall (T. and T. Clark, 1870), 223.

- 16 Bavli Sanh. 11a: "The Sages taught: After the last of the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, died, the Divine Spirit of prophetic revelation departed from the Jewish people. But nevertheless, they were still utilizing a Divine Voice [which they heard as kind of echo of prophecy] (*mishtamshin bevat kol*)." Cf. b. Sanh. 64a. We owe this reference to Shlomo Zuckier.
- 17 The interpretation of this verse was debated among different traditions of Islam, and that debate continues among modern scholars. Compare the different conclusions of Waqar Akhbar Cheema, "Scholars on the Meaning of Khātam al-Nabiyyin," *Journal for Islamic Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2013): 1–6, who gathers Sunni quotations to prove that the prophet Muhammad is the "seal" of all prophethood; with the more ecumenical reading in Marco Demichelis, "The *Khatim an-Nabiyyin* (The Seal of the Prophets) and Its Inclusive Abrahamic Perspective: Muhammad and 'Isa ibn Maryam in Dialogue," *Religions* 12, no. 4 (2021): <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel12010004>. The Manichean, Jewish, and Christian backgrounds of the seal-metaphor have themselves become an important subject of study: see Yohanan Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986): 178–215; Guy G. Stroumsa, "Seal of the Prophets: The Nature of A Manichaean Metaphor," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986): 61–74; and the critical evaluation of Friedmann by Uri Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy: On the Interpretation of the Quranic Surah al-Ahzab," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 164 (2014): 65–96. We thank Lea Schlenker for these references.

Prophet.¹⁸ Of course these Islamic recapitulations of the prophetic past did not prevent later Christians (and Jews) from in turn subsuming the Prophet Muhammad into their own traditions. In the nineteenth century, for instance, Mormons would proclaim that “the Gospel of Jesus Christ, restored to His Church in our day” is the only way to earthly and eternal happiness, while effortlessly incorporating Muhammad into their historical account as one of “the great religious leaders of the world” who received “a portion of God’s light.”¹⁹

In short, across time Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have (sometimes) interacted with and (more often) imagined each other, while continuing to produce and transform themselves by thinking about their competing claims to the past. The entirety of that dynamic and ongoing process we call “co-production.” It too constitutes an archive, one that has made historical hermeneutics not only a potent instrument of sectarian formation for communities *within* a given tradition, but also a powerful tool in polemic and apologetics *across* them. And just as it is true that *within* Islam, or Judaism, or Christianity, the archive of historical commitments constitutes an inexhaustible archive of possibilities that gives these religions the capacity for constant transformation of both past and present, the same should be true *across* them. The archive of all past historical commitments and imaginings through which these traditions in all their variety have co-produced each other—the vast majority of which have undoubtedly vanished without trace—constitutes an ocean to be explored not only by the historian who seeks to understand how Muslims, Christians, and Jews have thought about or experienced each other in the past, but also by the theologian “co-producing” Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the present and future.

Can historical theology take place within the combined archive of the three traditions? What impact could the exploration of the co-produced histories and hermeneutics have on theology within Islam, Christianity, and Judaism? At the very least, awareness of the historical co-production of these faiths should challenge segregated approaches to their histories and their hermeneutics, and suggest that within these three traditions theological

18 Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, trans. Feras Hamza (Fons Vitae, 2008). For the eschatological *ḥadīth* (in which we may hear co-produced echoes of Revelation 6:16 and Hosea 10:8), see Georges Vajda, “Juifs et musulmans selon le ḥadīth,” *Journal Asiatique* 229 (1937): 57–127.

19 First Presidency, “Statement of the First Presidency regarding God’s Love for All Mankind” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 15 February 1978).

thinking pursued without an awareness of the other two is partial and impoverished.

If it is true that Jews, Christians, and Muslims could scarcely think about God and revelation without also thinking about each other in the past, then this means that even in the present and the future, theology can scarcely be produced within one of these traditions without imagining the others. We should want to cultivate an awareness of that imagining. In other words: to think historically within the three religions implies attention not only to the development of one's own tradition, but also to the permanent entanglement of the three. Within each of the religious traditions, theologians make use, willy nilly, of the shared historical and hermeneutic archive in their thinking about God, the relationship of humans to God, the nature and meaning of revelation, and of the historical.

We would go so far as to say that Jews, Muslims, and Christians cannot understand their own religious tradition without taking into account how it has been shaped by the other two, real or imagined, in the manifold moments of their co-produced history.²⁰ The many competing and often polemical adaptations and appropriations within and across Judaism, Islam,

20 Our approach may seem similar to the Comparative Theology developed primarily by Roman Catholic theologians after the Second Vatican Councils in the 1960s: “faith seeking understanding through engaging other religious traditions” (to offer Catherine Cornille’s definition of comparative theology in “Resisting Religious Relativism in Comparative Theology,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Comparative Theology*, ed. Axel M. Oaks Takacs and Joseph L. Kimmel (Wiley Blackwell, 2024), 21–31, here 21; see also Marianne Moayert, “An Introduction to Christian-Jewish Comparative Theology,” in *A Companion to Comparative Theology*, ed. Pim Valkenberg, et al. (Brill, 2022), 111–31, at 121. But to us the notion of “other” so important in Comparative Theology seems methodologically problematic in approaching Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, precisely because these three religions are co-produced, that is, because they are historically and hermeneutically in constant interdependence. Comparative theologians have themselves debated whether their methodology can serve scholars of religions other than Christianity, and suggested that while this seems relatively straightforward for scholars of Hindu religions and Buddhism, it seems to be particularly challenging with regard to Judaism and Islam. See the discussion between Klaus von Stosch and Marianne Moyaert in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24 (2014): 59–77; cf. parts 2–6 of *A Companion to Comparative Theology*. Among scholars who adapt Comparative Theology for Islam are Dağ E. Akay, “Can Comparative Theology Help Muslims to a Better Understanding of Religious Diversity?,” in *New Methods in the Study of Islam*, ed. Abbas Aghdassi and Aaron W. Hughes (Edinburgh University Press: 2022), 199–220; Muhammad Legenhausen, “Comparative Theology in the Islamic Sciences,” *Journal of Philosophical Theological Research* 25 (2023): 37–54.

and Christianity can only be understood as such if historians and theologians become aware of what has been incorporated and transformed into a given religious tradition from others. And vice versa: what has been adopted and transformed in one tradition may also have provoked repercussions and re-appropriations in others.

An Example: Josephus-Yosippon and the Destruction (and Reconstruction) of Jerusalem

We have already touched upon an important example: the idea that the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans was a divine punishment for the sins of the Jews, an idea that very much shaped Christian and Islamic sacred histories. That shaping was in part based on Jewish voices, and here we mean not only on Israelite prophecies or utterances attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, but also the efforts of the Roman Jewish priest Flavius Josephus to make historical sense of his own experiences in what has come to be known as *The Jewish War*. Josephus' work became a touchstone for Christian authors seeking to support the supersessionist claim that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple provided historical proof of God's permanent punishment of the Jews for their rejection of Jesus as Messiah.²¹

In his early fourth century *Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius of Caesarea—often considered the “father of Church history” in the Christian tradition—referred his readers to Josephus as a witness that all biblical prophecies against the Jews and Jerusalem had been fulfilled.²² That witness was put to hard work. Particularly influential was the aptly titled *On the Destruction of Jerusalem*. That treatise, anonymously authored after the Emperor Julian's (“the Apostate”) failed effort to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple in the 360s, offered a Christian revision and rewritten Latin translation of Josephus's *Jewish War* under the Latinized name Hegesippus.²³ In this and other

21 Flavius Josephus, *De bello Iudaico*. The Greek title of the work would be best translated into English as “About the Judaean War”, but “The Jewish War” has actually become the common reference. For a Greek and German edition see Otto Michel and Otto Bauernfeind, eds., *De bello Iudaico—Der jüdische Krieg* (Kösel-Verlag, 1969; reprinted by Wbg Academic, 2013); for an English translation see, Henry St. John Thackeray and Ralph Marcus, trans., *The Jewish Wars*, vols. 1–3, Loeb Classical Library 203, 210, and 487 (Harvard University Press, 1927).

22 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstratio evangelica* 3.16.

23 (Ps-)Hegesippus, *De excidio Hierosolymitano*, in Hegesippus, *Historiae libri V. Praefatio et Indices*, ed. Vincentius Ussani, CSEL 66, no. 2 (Brepols, 1960). See Carson Bay,

Christian histories the Jews and Jerusalem provided the diagnostic hinge, establishing the legitimacy of the Christian claim to the Israelite record of God's actions in time.

Josephus' *Jewish War* offered an invaluable service to Christian historical theology, that of a Jew testifying against Judaism. But more than half a millennium after Eusebius and pseudo-Hegesippus, an anonymous Jew living in tenth century Southern Italy composed a Hebrew version of the Christianized Josephus. His *Book of Yōsippon* reclaimed the Jewish historian from his hitherto Christian purveyors in order to offer a narrative in which God attends to his Jewish people throughout a continuous history of alternating highs and lows.²⁴ The loss of the Temple is lamented extensively in the *Sefer Yōsippon*, but also integrated into a historical-theological scheme in which the triumph of the Romans (and thus of the Christians) is time-bound and temporary. Hence *Yōsippon* concludes with the hopeful (for the Jews) promise that God will comfort his people in Jerusalem, and with a prayer for that restoration and the rapid rebuilding of the Temple. In this sense, *Sefer Yōsippon* is not so much an effort to reverse history as it is an effort to reverse the Christian historico-theological appropriation of the Jewish past.

The Christian "Josephus" spread widely in both Latin and Byzantine Christianity, offering Christian theologians a "historical" argument to justify the oppression of Jews.²⁵ Similarly, and simultaneously, *Sefer Yōsippon* became one of the most popular books among Jews in the Middle Ages, helping

Biblical Heroes and Classical Culture in Christian Late Antiquity: The Historiography, Exemplarity, and Anti-Judaism of Pseudo-Hegesippus (Cambridge University Press, 2023); Carson Bay, "Writing the Jews out of History: Pseudo-Hegesippus, Classical Historiography, and the Codification of Christian Anti-Judaism in Late Antiquity," *Church History* 90, no. 2 (2021): 265–85.

- 24 *The Book of Josippon*, ed. David Flusser (The Bialik Institute, 1979–1981). English Translation: *Sefer Yōsippon. A Tenth-Century History of Ancient Israel*, translated and introduced by Stephen B. Bowman (Wayne State University Press, 2023). See Carson Bay, "The Jerusalem Temple and Jewish Identity between Pseudo-Hegesippus and Sefer Yosippon: The Discursive Aftermath of Josephus' Temple Ekphrasis," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (2022): 281–305.
- 25 The vast and varied reception of Josephus and *Sefer Yōsippon* is extensively covered by the recently published volume *From Josephus to Yōsippon and Beyond: Text – Re-interpretations – Afterlives*, ed. Carson Bay, Michael Avioz, and Jan Willem van Henten, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 215 (Brill, 2024). The current research project directed by Sabrina Iwlonocki and Moshe Blidstein and funded by the Israel Science Foundation and the University of Haifa titled, "Josephus Christianus: The Reception of Josephus in Greek Christian Literature (2nd–15th cent. CE)" will provide more insights in the reception of Josephus in Byzantine Christianity. See their project's website here: <https://sinowloc.wixsite.com/josephus-christianus>.

generations of Jews cope with oppression and persecution under Christian and Muslim domination. Our use of terms such as “cope” or “hope” is not meant to valorize the paths a history such as *Sefer Yosippon* could illuminate. Medieval Jews found justifications in that text for very different paths, ranging from *kiddush Hashem*—the sanctification of God’s name through martyrdom and ritualized suicide—to emigration from lands of diaspora to the Holy Land (what might anachronistically be called a nationalist awakening).

Sefer Yosippon also found its way into Judeo-Arabic, Arabic, Coptic, and Ethiopic languages, providing Muslim and Christian communities in Africa with possibilities for interpretations of world history.²⁶ When the Muslim historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldūn came to Egypt to collect sources for his universal history, the *Kitāb al-Ibar*, in the 1370s, he was especially pleased to have finally found a composition by the Jewish historian Yūsūf ibn Kuryūn concerning the history of the Temple and the “two kingdoms” that had elapsed between “its first destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, and its second destruction under Titus, to him [Yūsūf ibn Kuryūn] the ‘great *galūt*’” (a borrowing from the Hebrew word for exile).²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn’s presentation of

26 The Judeo-Arabic *Sefer Yosippon* served as the source for the Arabic *Kitāb Akhbār al-Yahūd* which originated in North Africa in the eleventh or twelfth century and was known and used by Muslim authors such as Ibn Khazm, Ibn Khaldūn and al-Maqrīzī. See Avraham Sela, *The Arabic Book of Yosef Ben Gorion: Texts in Arabic and Judeo-Arabic with a Hebrew Translation and Introduction* (in Hebrew, 2 vol.; Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2009). The Qur’an commentator al-Biqā’ī used Josephus to explain Sura 17:7, where the destruction of the Temple by the Romans is cited as punishment of the Israelites, on which see Philip I. Lieberman, “Jews as Producers and Consumers of History in the Medieval Islamic World,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 16 (2021): 292–312, esp. 301–303. The Arabic *Yosippon* was translated into Coptic and Ethiopic and gained a quasi-canonical status as the third Maccabean book in the Christian communities of North Africa by the thirteenth century. Facing persecution from Muslim authorities, Christian readers identified with the Jewish heroes and assigned to their Muslim rulers the Romans’ role in this ‘Josephian’ work. See Ronny Vollandt, “Ancient Jewish Historiography in Arabic Garb: *Sefer Josippon* between Southern Italy and Coptic Cairo,” *Ẓūtot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 11, no. 1 (2014): 70–80; Yonatan Binyam, “Studies in *Sefer Yosippon*: The Reception of *Sefer Yosippon* in Medieval Hebrew, Arabic, and Ethiopic Literature” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2017); and Katja Vehlou, “Historiography,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume 5: Jews in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. Philip I. Lieberman (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 974–992.

27 Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ibar*, 8 vols., eds. Khalīl Shahāda and Suhayl Zakkār (Dār al-Fikr, 1981), vol. 2: 134. For the use of *Sefer Yosippon*, see Walter J. Fischel, “Ibn Khaldun and Josippon,” *Homenaje a Millas-Valllicrossa*, vol. I (Barcelona, 1954), 587–598; Martino Diez, “With Ibn Haldūn in His Workshop: What He Read in Ibn al-‘Amīd, What He Retained, and Why,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 16 (2021): 196–232.

the role of the Jews in world history is distinctive among Islamic (and also Christian) historians, and may well have been influenced by *Sefer Yosippon*'s stress on cycles of transgression, repentance, and restoration. In Ibn Khaldūn's account, Jews are exemplary of the fate all conquered peoples suffer. Jewish history demonstrates, in Ibn Khaldūn, how nations and groups that lose their autonomy, territory, and self-determination experience inner disruption and decline under foreign rule.

Unlike the tendency in Christian histories, in Ibn Khaldūn's account the conquest of Jerusalem was the origin of the Jews' corruption, not its consequence: it marked the beginning and was the cause of their moral destruction in the diaspora. Note that despite his deliberate abstinence from theological reasoning about God's punishment of the Jews, the socio-political claims Ibn Khaldūn takes from the past are potentially just as supersessionist as those Christians took from their sacred histories. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the Jews (like many conquered peoples in his theory of history) lost their sense of group consciousness and social cohesion (*ʿaṣabiyya*) after the conquest of Jerusalem. They therefore became corrupted, a threat to society that needs to be suppressed and controlled.²⁸ Ibn Khaldūn's anti-Judaism presents itself more as historical sociology than historical theology but is itself drawn from Islamic readings of Jewish re-appropriations of a Christianized Josephus.

The influence of *Sefer Yosippon* did not end with Ibn Khaldūn. Christian Europe absorbed it as well, with the translation of the Hebrew *Sefer Yosippon* into Latin in the bilingual edition provided by the reformed Hebraist Sebastian Münster in 1541 in Basel, and then also into different modern languages.²⁹ In 1718, it became the first book printed in British North America, and towards the end of the nineteenth century *Yosippon* helped provide the Zionist movement with a historical past capable of reawakening hope for a national restoration among Jews.³⁰ In short, Josephus/*Yosippon*

28 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah* 1,2,12. See Kalman Bland, "An Islamic Theory of Jewish History: The Case of Ibn Khaldun," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18, no. 3–4 (1983): 189–197.

29 See the two chapters by Nadia Zeldes and Andrea Schatz in *From Josephus to Yosippon*: Nadia Zeldes, "The Christian Reception of Sefer Yosippon in Western Europe," at 577–598, and Andrea Schatz, "Un-writing the End: Histories and Counter-histories in the Early Modern *Yosippon*," at 599–622.

30 On British North America see "The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Later Times of the Jews with the Destruction of Jerusalem" attributed to "Josephus Ben-Goron, the Learned and Warlike Jew," 1718. The book's title page contained an explicit reference to "A Parallel of the Late Times, and Crimes in London, with those in Jerusalem." See E. Wolf, "The First Book of Jewish

offers a dense example of how objects in a co-produced historical archive provide foundations for the ongoing creation of history and theology in each of the three religious traditions.

What is true of these today obscure texts is even truer of Jerusalem/al-Quds itself. In appropriating, expropriating and re-appropriating narratives about the destruction of that city and its temple, all three traditions have put history to the work of theology, and vice versa. In doing so they have repeatedly produced new opportunities not only for appropriation, expropriation and re-appropriation by the other two traditions, but also for creating socio-political realities, as they continue to do today.

The interplay between the historical-theological and the socio-political becomes manifest in the common and conflicting claims the three religions have been making about the Temple Mount.³¹ “How can the Temple of God be built in that place?” was the rhetorical question raised by the Christian monk Athanasius of Sinai, who witnessed the first Muslim building projects of the Umayyads in seventh century Jerusalem. Athanasius railed “against those who believe and say that what is now being built in Jerusalem is the temple of God,” and he objects: “The judgement still stands, which says to the Jews about it: ‘Behold, this house is left a waste.’ (cf. Matthew 23:38 quoting Jeremiah 22:5). Christ said ‘is left,’ which is to say it will remain a waste forever. For the ‘last glory’ of the house (cf. Haggai 2:9) was burned down in the times of Titus, and after the last, there is no other ‘last’ glory. Nothing is ‘laster’ than the last.”³² In other words, Athanasius is here deploying a collage of biblical prophecies both Jewish and Christian about

Authorship Printed in America,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1971): 229–34. Regarding Zionist movements see, Steven Bowman, “Yosippon and Jewish Nationalism,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 61 (1995): 23–51. In his 1898 short story *Be-Derekh Rehokah*, Micha Josef Berdyczewski describes his disturbance reading about the Jewish heroes and their fate in the *Sefer Yosippon*, and the immediate reawakening he felt of nationalist pride. Berdyczewski would publish under the name of the author of Yosippon, Ben-Gorion, collecting stories of Jewish heroes to support the *Aliyah* in his vast anthology *Mimekor Yisrael*.

31 The remainder of this section overlaps in examples, language, and conclusions with David Nirenberg, *The Power of History and the Place of the Historian in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Lucas Prize Lecture (Mohr Siebeck, 2026) and David Nirenberg, “The Powers of History in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” Buber Lecture at the Israel Academy of Sciences, held on August 4, 2025.

32 Athanasius Sinaites, *Narrationes Collection C*, ch. 3, ed. Stefan Heid, “Die C-Reihe erbaulicher Erzählungen des Anastasios vom Sinai im Codex Vaticanus Graecus 2592,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 74 (2008): 78–114, at 81–82. Heid provides the Greek text with a German translation. The English translation of the Greek and the cross-references to the biblical prophets are our own.

Jerusalem, as well as historical knowledge as provided by Josephus-Hegesippus in order to attack the construction work of Caliph Umar and his Umayyad successors. They, for their part, built the mosques of Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock upon the site of the Temple Mount in an attempt to assert the truth claims of Islam by revitalizing worship at the place whose ruins had until then been regarded by Christians as historical proof of their own triumph in sacred history.

Muslims were not the only ones among “those who believe and say that what is now being built in Jerusalem is the House of God.” Some near-contemporary Jews celebrated the same building projects Athanasius condemned. A “prophecy” about Mu‘āwiyah, the first Umayyad Caliph (but presumably written in the late Umayyad or early Abassid period, after the building of al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock) claimed that “At the instigation of God, he will rebuild the walls of the Temple.”³³ From the point of view of the political theology of the Temple Mount today, it may seem surprising to find a Jewish prophecy arrayed alongside Islam and against Christianity on this score, but that too was a powerful potential within these traditions.

Indeed, only some decades after Athanasius’ intervention against and the Jewish prophetic support for the construction projects on the Temple Mount, the Muslim scholar Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 767 CE) commented on the Qur’anic verse al-Baqarah 2:114 (“And who does greater wrong than one who bars [entrance to] the mosques of God, lest His Name be remembered therein, and strives for their destruction? They are those who should not enter them, save in fear”). The verse, in his view,

[R]efers to the fact that the Romans vanquished the Jews, such that they killed them, enslaved them, destroyed Jerusalem and filled it with corpses and slaughtered pigs. Then a second time in the Roman period Titasar [Titus?] son of Sunabatus who was called Stephen [?] slaughtered them and laid waste Jerusalem. Then it remained uninhabited until the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab. So God says: “They”—that is, the Romans—“are those who should not”—it is undesirable that they should—“enter them”—that is, the Holy Land since the sending of Muhammad—“save in fear.” Thus

33 The “prophecy” retrospectively describes (in guise of prophecy) the reign of each Umayyad Caliph. See Israel Lévi, “Une apocalypse judéo-arabe,” *Revue des études juives* 67 (1914): 178–82.

it is that today, no Roman enters Jerusalem but that he is fearful and wearing a disguise, for whoever seizes one of them punishes him.³⁴

We might almost think we were reading a Late Antique Christian description of the banishment of the Jews from Jerusalem. Only here the banishment is of the Christians, for having banished the Jews. And lest we think this interpretation is marginal, we have but to turn to the most classical of authorities, Abū Jaʿfar ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), who expanded upon the theme by gathering the differing views of previous exegetes, adding his own interpretation, and concluding that the verse refers to “the Christians, inasmuch as they strove to destroy Bayt al-Maqdis (i.e. Jerusalem), and helped Nebuchadnezzar to do so, and forbade the believers among the Children of Israel from praying there after Nebuchadnezzar turned them away from there unto his own country.”³⁵

How intriguing, the anachronism by which the Christians are associated, not only with the Romans whose destruction of Jerusalem’s Temple in 70 CE the Christians imagined as God’s punishment of the Jews for the crucifixion of Christ, but with the destruction of the first Temple as well, centuries before the birth of Jesus or the rise of Christianity. In these three religions there are, at any moment, multiple competing claims clamoring to make sense of or influence the world.

The Historical as Co-incidence of Past, Present, Future, and Eternal

If Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are understood as co-produced at their core and if co-production is a never-ending dynamic in their shared history, then every moment of the past has the potential to be put to constructive theological work at some later moment within the three religions. By constructive theological work we mean the critical re-evaluation and normative reconfiguration of self-positionings within history, whether in the name of peace and love (to choose possibilities suggested by these religions themselves), or of conflict and violence. This last point is important.

34 Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta, 5 vols. (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth, 2003), here vol. 1: 132–133. We thank David Gyllenhaal for bringing these passages to our attention, for his translation, and for his insights on their meaning and context.

35 Abū Jaʿfar ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, 26 vols. (Dār Hajr li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīa, 2001), vol. 2: 442–446.

Enlarging the archives of (inter)religious history does not reduce the possibilities for conflict or contempt within and between the traditions. It may even expand them. Because adherents of the three religions, in all their competing variety, have often used the historical for polemical and apologetic purposes, these archives contain countless instances of opposition, supersession, separation, even extermination—many more, perhaps, than moments of appreciation, recognition, toleration, or merely indifference.³⁶ “Gratitude” and “guilt” are both proximate potentials within this shared archive, and difficult (perhaps impossible) for the historian or the theologian to separate from one another.

But again, these historical co-productions are not irreversible. The relationship between past, present, and future includes the possibility that the present might transform the past (re-interpretation), and that the re-interpretation of the past might transform the future. If that seems too strong, consider our earlier point that within these historical faiths, believers have been and are called upon to commit at least tacitly to some sense of how the historical, the lived present, and the eternal relate to each other. Those commitments have vastly varied not only over time, space, and sect, but also within the individual believer (even the faith of a saint is built upon sands of time and fissures of psyche). The totality of all these past commitments—the vast majority of which, we repeat, have undoubtedly vanished without trace—constitutes an archive of potentials not only for historians of religion, but for all who seek to relate time and the historical to the divine and eternal.

Hence we insist that historical religions contain within themselves, precisely insofar as they are historical, the capacity for constant transformation of both past and present. Within these religions norms are created in the name of the historical, and challenged, even shattered, in the same name. In other words, when historians discover new meaning in the past, they may simultaneously be offering a powerful resource to future theologians. The echo with *ressourcement* is here deliberate. In the mid-twentieth century, French Catholic theologians whose faith had been shaken by the horrors of two world wars sought ancient and medieval resources for a “nouvelle théologie” capable of addressing the concerns of their present. For their part they sought succor largely in the sources of their own tradition. But we might ask today—shaken by our own horrors—what resources the co-produced archive might offer Islamic, Jewish, and Christian theologies.

36 For examples, see the collective volume *Claiming History in Religious Conflicts*, ed. Adrian Brändli and Katharina Heyden, *Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana* 39 (Schwabe, 2021).

And we might wonder if such co-produced theologies could offer an increasingly globalized and entangled world new spiritual resources for the treatment of real or imagined others within and across the three religions.³⁷

We have been elaborating an understanding of the historical within these three traditions as a co-incidence of the past, the present, the future, and the eternal. That understanding is not idiosyncratic: there have been thinkers at every stage in the histories of these three religions who have formulated the idea that the temporality of God's teaching cannot be grasped in a single moment of revelation in time, nor understood as a developing line that stretches from the past over the present to the future. We could dwell in the Middle Ages, with Ibn Arabi's (d. 1240 CE) commentary on the 29th verse of the Qur'an's 55th Sura, *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*: "Every day he reveals himself in a fresh state." This means, according to the famous mystic and philosopher, that "He—exalted be He—does not manifest Himself in a single way to multiple people, or indeed in a single way to the same person twice."³⁸ But we will conclude with modernity, and Franz Rosenzweig's (d. 1929 CE) formulation shortly after the first World War, in his *Star of Redemption*: "Revelation is in the present, and indeed it is the present par excellence. It looks back to the past in the moment where it would like to give its present actuality the form of the statement, but it sees this past only by shining into it the light of the present; it is only in this backward glance that the past reveals itself to be the foundation and portent of the presently lived experience housed in the I."³⁹

We do not claim to fully grasp Rosenzweig's theology of history here, any more than we claim to fully grasp that of any other thinker touched upon in these pages. But we do see in this passage a rich expression of the sensibility toward revelation in time that Hodgson characterized more

37 On the French "ressourcement" theology in the 1930s–1950s and its engagement with history see Marcellino D'Ambrosio, "Ressourcement Theology, *Aggiornamento*, and the Hermeneutics of Tradition," *Communio*, 18, no. 4 (1992): 530–55.

38 Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, 4 vols. (Bulāq [Cairo]: n.p., 1911; reprint, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 4:212.

39 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 200 = *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1921/1988), 207: "Die Offenbarung ist gegenwärtig, ja ist das Gegenwärtigsein selber. Die Vergangenheit, in die auch sie zurücksieht in dem Augenblick, wo sie ihrer Gegenwärtigkeit die Form der Aussage geben möchte, wird ihr nur sichtbar, indem sie mit dem Licht der Gegenwart in sie hineinleuchtet: erst in diesem Blick rückwärts erweist sich die Vergangenheit als Grund und Voraussage des gegenwärtigen, im Ich behausten Erlebens." Cf. Myriam Bienenstock, "Recalling the Past in Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*," *Modern Judaism* 23, no. 3 (2003): 226–242.

technically as “kerygmatic” and understood as shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Within modern Jewish thought, Rosenzweig was one of the deepest explorers of this sensibility.⁴⁰ But this does not mean, of course, that he was not enmeshed—as Hodgson was, as are we all—in the ongoing co-production of history and theology between the three religions. In the same work we find Rosenzweig putting (his imagination of) Islam to work as a negative foil for his idea of Judaism and Christianity as historical religions: “Mohammed found and took over the idea of Revelation as one picks up something found, that is to say without producing it from out of its presuppositions. The Koran is a ‘Talmud’ that is not based on a ‘Scripture’; it is a ‘New Testament’ without the ‘Old.’ Islam has only Revelation, and not prophecy.”⁴¹ Islam is here separated from Judaism and Christianity as lacking the sense of the theological potential of history. Our discussion of Hodgson and Ahmed should make clear that we do not agree with this presentation of Islam. In fact, we see Rosenzweig’s treatment of Islam as yet another example of co-production, in this case a strategy utilized in all three traditions that we call “the excluded third,” in which similarities between two traditions are stressed in order to define and affine them against another.⁴²

Conclusion: Hope and Humility

We have suggested that the existential significance of every moment in time, the potential coincidence of the historical and the eternal in every present, is central to an understanding of revelation in many strands of all three

40 A great deal has been written on Rosenzweig’s philosophy of history. For us, Paul Mendes-Flohr’s 1991 essay “Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism,” in Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Wayne State University Press, 1991), 311–399, remains an instructive encounter.

41 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 127 = *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 129: “Muhammed hat den Gedanken der Offenbarung vorgefunden und übernommen, wie man ein Vorgefundenes übernimmt, nämlich ohne es aus seinen Voraussetzungen zu erzeugen. Der Koran ist ein ‘Talmud’, dem keine ‘Schrift’, ein ‘Neues Testament’, dem kein ‘Altes’ zugrunde liegt. Der Islam hat nur die Offenbarung und nicht die Weissagung.” (Galli has “a find” instead of “something found” for “ein Vorgefundenes”; and “prediction” instead of “prophecy” for “Weissagung”). On Rosenzweig’s critique of Islam see Matthias Lehmann, “Franz Rosenzweigs Kritik des Islam im ‘Stern der Erlösung,’” *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 1, no. 4 (1993): 340–361; Zohar Mihaely, “Rosenzweig’s Critique of Islam and its Value Today,” *Roczniki Kulturoznawcze* 11 (2022): 5–34.

42 For historical examples, we refer to the upcoming collective volume *The Excluded Third in the Co-production of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Katharina Heyden and Davide Scotto, CORE 4 (Brepols, 2028).

religions. From this, we would also derive an answer to the question of what theology and history can offer each other. Theology can remind historians that the people whose actions and thoughts historians seek to explore could themselves experience their own present, profane and contingent as it may seem to the historian, as pregnant with potential theological significance, participating in the co-production of the past, the future, and the eternal. History can reinforce theologians' sense that the development in time of ideas about God cannot be explained in terms of eternal or ineluctable necessity, but at best with a particular plausibility that flows from contemporary circumstances, power relations, restrictions or extensions of knowledge, and other contingent factors. And each offers the other a further awareness: that this historical contingency also has constructive potential, potential that the historian and theologian can realize together.

These possibilities of exchange hold true within any one of these traditions. But we are especially interested in the possibilities for theology and history to think together across the entangled and co-produced pasts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As we have seen, for believers in these three religions and for inhabitants of the secular cultures derived from them, participation in history is a form of ultimate commitment freighted with all the gravity of the irreversible. And yet, as we have attempted to argue throughout this essay, that same history has also been (and is still being) constantly transformed within and across these three religions by the power of historical interpretation. These two truths are not easy to maintain simultaneously, but both theologians and historians have much to gain by doing so. Not least among the benefits: the temperance of hope by humility

After all, in all the examples we have offered, history has served theology as the foundation for a principle of hope. That hope has based itself on different models of history, to be sure. One we have encountered was the Eusebian-Hegelian trajectory of progress, which offers the hope that humanity's course is one of divinely guided improvement. Another, very different from the first, was the commitment to the possibility that divine power—perhaps moved by human repentance—might restore an earlier possibility or promise: the hope that within the temporality of divine history even ruins can be restored, and abrogation abrogated. Doubtless there are other models of history produced by the interaction of these religions as well, many offering their own principles of hope. Hope is, it seems, one of the most important offerings of the union of history and theology in these religions. But both the historian and the theologian should notice that this hope has often come with a price: that the others should be overcome, left behind, excluded, or even exterminated.

Here our effort to shift historical attention from discrete traditions to the co-produced archive has something to offer, since it exhorts us to remember that these three religious traditions have taken shape and continue to take shape in relation to and competition with each other. The historical recognition of that relation and competition may itself have theological consequences. It can, and often has, provoked anxiety of influence and violent efforts at distancing or purification. But it can also, and often has, stimulated a sense of common humanity, humbled by mortality and the unknowable vastness of divinity, and grateful for the revelation of hope-filled pathways toward eternity. Histories and theologies of co-production can help us perceive both these potentials, and many more.

It may seem anachronistic to speak of competition, of the existence of many potentials for faith, or of gratitude for that diversity, as if we were simply re-articulating the relativistic historicizing methodologies of liberal modernity. But nothing we have written here seems to us alien to the histories of these faiths themselves. We have already seen how their revelations and teachings have long enjoined upon the believer an attention to history (hence the term “historical religions”). The same is true of competition between plural paths to eternity, and humility before the unknowable. “For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ,” as the Qur’an has it (al-Ma’idah 5:48). Similar tones can be perceived in Christian and Jewish voices. The “Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men,” written by the Christian philosopher Ramon Llull first in Arabic, and then also in Catalan and Latin in the 1270s, ends with the Jew, the Muslim, and the Christian unanimously refusing the opportunity to learn which of their religions the neutral arbitrator in their debate considers to be true. “If, in front of us, you state which religion it is that you prefer, then we would not have such a good subject of discussion nor such satisfaction in discovering the truth.”⁴³ The sixteenth century Rabbi Shlomo Luria took what is arguably an even broader view, writing that “the words of the living God” have many variant meanings, and “in a debate between true scholars, all positions articulated represent a form of truth.”⁴⁴ Or in the words of Maimonides, himself deeply

43 Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, ed. and trans. Anthony Bonner, in *Selected Works of Raymond Llull* (Princeton University Press, 1985), vol. 1, 95–305, here 302.

44 See, e.g., b. ‘Eruvim 13b. We say arguably, because Rabbi Luria might not have understood his words as applying so broadly. Shlomo Luria, *Tam Shel Shlomo on*

influenced by Islamic thought, “you should hear the truth whoever speaks it.”⁴⁵

Again, none of these examples is free of ambivalent potentials. Llull, for one, was himself a dogged missionary, and even his attempt to learn Arabic came at the cost of his Muslim teacher’s life. We are not looking for univocal lessons or exemplary figures in the archives of the past. But we do find in those archives ample support for the conclusion that the hopes of Christians, Jews, and Muslims have always competed with and developed in relation to each other, and that they will continue to do so, because they are fundamentally co-produced. Many philosophers, divines, and historians have over the course of the past two millennia attempted to distill the diversity of commitments in these archives into progressive and largely exclusionary histories of “Abrahamic” hope. But as historians we prefer to explore how that long history of competition and relation has generated many potentials, and as theologians, to ask what resources those possibilities can offer theologies of hope in the present. We have suggested that within these historical religions, theologians and historians inevitably contribute to competitive relations. The question we are attempting to answer here in the

Tractate Hullin (Seligman Ruiz, 1718), “First Introduction,” 1a. There are many statements about the polysemous nature of God’s words in the classical rabbinic corpus, some gathered in Azzan Yadin, “The hammer on the rock: polysemy and the school of Rabbi Ishmael,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2003): 1–17. We are grateful to Shlomo Zuckier for providing this example.

- 45 This motto (appearing in the foreword to his “Eight Chapters”; see Moses Maimonides, “Eight Chapters” in *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, ed. Raymond L. Weiss [New York University Press, 1975], 59–104, at 60) is similar to and perhaps influenced by that of Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Kindī (d. 873), a major patron of Graeco-Arabic translations, who stated in the introduction to his book on Metaphysics: “We ought not to be ashamed of appreciating the truth and of acquiring it wherever it comes from, even if it comes from races distant and nations different from us. For the seeker of truth nothing takes precedence over the truth, and there is no disparagement of the truth, nor belittling either of him who speaks it or of him who conveys it.” See *Kitāb al-Kindī ilā al-Mu‘tasim bi-Allah fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, ed. Roshdi Rashed and Jean Jolivet, *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindī, vol. 2, Métaphysique et cosmologie* (Brill, 1998), 13; translation Alfred L. Ivry, *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics: A Translation of Ya‘qub ibn Ishāq al-Kindī’s Treatise “On First Philosophy”* (fī al-Falsafah al-Ūlā) (State University of New York Press, 1974), 58. See Lukas Muchletaler, “Hear the Truth Whoever Speaks It: Moses Maimonides and his Adjuration,” in *Höre die Wahrheit, wer sie auch spricht’. Stationen des Werkes von Moses Maimonides vom islamischen Spanien bis ins moderne Berlin* (Schriften des Jüdischen Museums, 2014), 13–20. On the reception of Maimonides among Muslim thinkers see Amir Mazor, “‘Hear the Truth Whoever Speaks it’: Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* in the Eyes of Medieval Muslims,” *Chilufim: Zeitschrift für Jüdische Kulturgeschichte* 31 (2024): 1–30.

affirmative is if they can do so in a simultaneously critical and constructive way.

One way to imagine that is as some kind of complementary collaboration between different “faculties” (as Kant put it), in which the historian’s attention is reserved for the critical, and the theologian’s for the constructive. We would, rather, think about how each can simultaneously integrate critical and constructive thinking in their engagement with the co-produced historical archive of the three religions.

What would it mean for historians to do their work on the co-produced archive in a simultaneously critical and constructive way? Perhaps it would be enough simply to cultivate an awareness that, regardless of the historian’s intentions, research into the past of “historical religions” is not independent of those religions. It is not only that historical methodologies and philosophies have emerged from and been shaped by those religions, but also that historians’ practices create constructive theological potentials for those religions, as well as “de-constructive,” critical, relativizing or secularizing ones. That awareness might lessen historians’ confidence about their ability to fully emancipate their methodologies and disciplinary assumptions from those of the competing religious traditions they study. But it might also increase the sense that their work has significance, in that the study of the entangled relations between past peoples offers possibilities for people to come. Every historical exploration of the interaction between the three religions, whether in action or thought, creates new possibilities for life and unexpected potentials for understanding for future generations, regardless of the historian’s intentions.

Whether they wish to or not, theologians, too, make use of the shared historical and hermeneutic archive in their thinking about God, the relationship of humans to God, the nature and meaning of revelation, and of the historical. For them acknowledging the co-produced histories of their faiths could mean exploring and acknowledging ever more what their own tradition owes to the others, again in the positive and negative sense of owing. From this insight into their deeply ambivalent historical heritage, they might draw an intrinsic interest in the other traditions and recognize them as both competing with and complementing one another in their own attempts to respond to human contingency and the inexhaustibility of the divine.⁴⁶

46 We think here, for example, of Amir Dziri’s critical-constructive re-assessment of “The Co-production of Alteration (*tahrīf*) and Adherence (*tamassuk*). Muslim Attitudes toward the Qur’ān in Reaction to Accusations against Jews and Christians of Changing the ‘Tawrah’ and ‘Injil’;” and Reinhold Bernhardt offering “A Christology Sensitive to Jewish and Muslim Concerns” in which he describes

This might be our methodological desire from the perspective of our own hopes and fears in the present. Yet we have also tried to make clear—that we don’t get to say—if we want to remain historical—that one way of putting to work the uncountable potentials of religious co-production is true to the archive and another is not. Any potential produced by interpreting the archive is in some sense true to it. Precisely for this reason it is our responsibility, both as historians and as theologians, to decide which of these many often-ambivalent potentials, co-produced in an infinite number of moments in the past, we wish to activate today in historical or theological writing, in teaching or in pastoral care. We must ask ourselves why we do so, with what disciplinary warrant, and to what end. But even as we do so we should recognize simultaneously that, within the study of these three “historical religions,” such decisions are potentially fateful ones, and that no one can know with certainty what their consequences will be in the fulness of time. In that simultaneity lie both hope and humility, the two gifts that the co-produced archive offers the theologian and the historian of these three religions.

Holding these two gifts in one hand is not easy. Consider “Theology after Auschwitz,” one of the most interesting attempts to find constructive theological responses to horrors that had themselves been partly nourished by theologies of history. Drawing on the philosopher Hans Jonas’ rereading of kabbalistic traditions, that theology imagined the one and almighty God as deliberately powerless, a creator who subjects his own destiny to his creation, to the world, to history.⁴⁷ Christian theologians, particularly in Germany, gratefully took up this idea, finding in it new possibilities to (re)discover the dignity and beauty of kenotic motifs in their own intellectual tradition, even beyond confessional boundaries.⁴⁸ In the suffering Christ, they

“this kind of theology [...] as co-produced because it takes Jewish and Muslim perspectives seriously and incorporates them into its own reflections [...] not in a negative (apologetic or even polemical) but in a positive way by regarding them as dialogue-partners that help to clarify one’s own Christology, to protect it against misunderstanding and to transform it so that it might be more convincing even for Christians” (293). Both essays are published in *The Co-production of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Artefacts, Rituals, Communities, Narratives, Doctrines, Concepts*, ed. Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg (Brepols, 2025), 275–292 for Dziri and 293–311 for Bernhardt, here 293.

47 Hans Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz: Eine jüdische Stimme* (Suhkamp, 1984). An English version was also published by Hans Jonas, “The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice,” *The Journal of Religion* 67, no. 1 (1987): 1–13.

48 Christian theologians often denote this with the Greek term “kenotic,” thereby christianizing the kabbalistic idea in what is itself a symptom of co-production; cf. the re-evaluation of kenotic theology in Bruce Lindley McCormack, *The Humility of*

found a figure that enabled them to continue speaking of God after the Shoah. It also inspired historians and theologians to critically reevaluate the long history of Christian anti-Judaism. We could even say that it offered the “historical religions,” to recall Hodgson once again, the possibility of incorporating the historical into the doctrine of God in the most consequent way. God no longer directs history from outside, nor does he intervene in it or reveal himself in historical events, as in the long tradition of Christian historical thinking we have discussed. Instead, God himself becomes historical in the deepest sense, as he surrenders himself to human history, thereby summoning mankind to responsibility not only for each other but also for (rather than *before*) God himself. Is that not an ingenious theological turn, a new alliance between humility and hope, a way of combining the historically critical and the theologically constructive?

And yet it is also true that even this best-intentioned and historically responsible theology is one more inscription in the long history of Christian appropriations and incorporations of Judaism. In fact, Jonas’ “Gottesbegriff” proved more attractive to Christian theologians than to Jewish thinkers, an asymmetry that we should want to explore. We don’t say this to dismiss or criticize Christian “Theology after Auschwitz,” or any other Jewish, Christian, or Muslim attempt to put to work historical events for a “better” theology. We only wish to emphasize that the deeply ambivalent co-productive dynamics never stop. There is a tragic potentiality in the co-production of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity as historical religions, and an abiding danger of falling into the same traps of historico-theological reasoning time and again.

Hence the need for a strong and lasting partnership between critical and constructive thinking, a partnership that can reinforce the ability of theologians and historians to recognize and reflect upon the ongoing potentials of religious co-production in their own practice. We say “recognize,” not “avoid.” Within a world shaped by “historical religions,” avoiding co-productions is impossible. But there is much to be learned simply from recognition and reflection. Among the most important and the easiest of those lessons: for both the historically alert theologian and the theologically attentive historian, their own present and their own work must not be seen as the end point of a historical development. They can never be other than a moment within the entangled and ongoing temporalities of the world.

the Eternal Son (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

To put it positively, co-production can recall historians and theologians to what we will call the virtue of eschatological humility. Compare the “epistemic humility” to which comparative theology summons dogmatic thinkers: “[H]umble awareness of the limitation of one’s own understanding and experience and of the possibility of change and growth.”⁴⁹ We share a sense of the value of epistemic humility, but our method seeks to develop as well an awareness of the degree to which our eschatological hopes and our historical tools (that is, the tools we draw on to determine what constitutes change and growth, what constitutes movement toward or away from our hopes and ideals) are themselves co-produced and inseparable. Hence the need for an eschatological humility that would have us cultivate scepticism toward claims that the kerygmatic can be legibly mapped onto the historical, while at the same time recognizing that the imperative to do so is a basic aspect of these religions, and of the many cultures of modernity they have deeply influenced.

Those who inhabit these religions and cultures will continue to compete over the correct interpretation of past events and their prophetic potentials, assigning each other places in rival histories of revelation and salvation. Given the complexity of the world, the nature of human knowledge, and the inescapably fragmentary limitations of the historical archive, that striving will not yield truths we should presume to call eternal. What it will articulate is a shared hope in the utility of history as a mode to address a future that beckons always beyond the reach of human knowledge.

Katharina Heyden has been Professor of Ancient History of Christianity and Interreligious Encounters at the University of Bern (Switzerland) since 2014. **David Nirenberg** has been the Director and Leon Levy Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (US) since 2022. Together they co-lead the international research initiative “Co-produced Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” launched in 2022 (www.coproduced-religions.org).



49 See Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (Crossroads 2008), 388. This definition of epistemic humility is only one of many on offer, and it is perhaps already self-contradictory in expressing confidence that we can know what constitutes (positive) change and growth.

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ARTICLE

***Lego-lego* and the Co-production of Religion: Orality, Performance, and Decolonial Agency in Eastern Indonesia**

Adriana Tunliu

Abstract

Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg argue that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are co-produced religions—faiths that have historically formed and transformed through mutual interaction, imagination, and contestation. This paper extends their framework to Alor-Pantar, Indonesia, where interreligious life unfolds not only in textual or theological forms but in oral traditions, ritual performance, and embodied practices. Drawing on Izak Lattu's oral-based interreligious engagement and Mery Kolimon's exploration of boundary negotiation and hybrid identity in Timor Barat, this study examines *Lego-lego*, a traditional mass dance in Alor-Pantar with *pantun adat*, *moko* drums, and communal movements. *Lego-lego* functions as a living site where Islam, Christianity, and Indigenous traditions encounter and reshape one another. While Christian and Muslim influences appear in lyrics and gestures, the dance's Indigenous form sustains local epistemology, ensuring that co-production occurs on community-defined terms. Beyond illustrating hybridity or syncretism, *Lego-lego* enacts an embodied epistemology rooted in orality, kinship, and performance. It demonstrates that religious tradition in Alor-Pantar is not fixed but negotiated through communal practices. *Lego-lego* also mediates Muslim-Christian relations, facilitating ethical interaction and shared cultural participation. This study situates Indigenous ritual at the center of Religious Co-Production (RCoP), showing how world religions are continually co-produced in practice through performance, narrative, and relational engagement.

Keywords

Lego-lego, religious co-production (RCoP), Indonesia, oral tradition, Indigenous ritual, interreligious encounter, boundary and identity negotiation.

I. Introduction

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago with over 17,000 islands and 1,000 ethnic groups, recognizes six national religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, alongside numerous Indigenous faiths. The *Pancasila* state framework and the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity") provide an ideological basis for coexistence, yet tensions persist. Since the fall of Soeharto's New Order in 1998, religious conflicts, marginalization, and radicalism have affected many regions. Against this backdrop, Alor-Pantar in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) stands out for its relatively sustained interfaith harmony, maintained primarily through cultural practices rather than state policy.¹

One such practice is the *Lego-lego* dance, an Indigenous communal ritual embodying cohesion, ancestral reverence, and harmony with nature.² Performed in circular formations with *pantun adat* (oral poetry) and *moko* (drums), *Lego-lego* conveys collective identity and ethical principles such as *lukkiai* (respect, cooperation) and *mayai* (unity through handholding).³

1 The archipelago has more than two big islands of Alor and Pantar. It has some smaller islands, including Sika, Kepa, Pura, Ternate (not to be confused with Ternate in the North Moluccas), Buaya, and Tereweng.

2 There is no reliable information about the origin of this work of art. However, unlike M.A. Bouman, "De Aloreesche dansplaats," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 3, no. 4 (1943): 481-500, and S. Rodemeier, "Local Tradition on Alor and Pantar: An Attempt at Localizing Galiyao," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 151, no. 3 (1995): 438-442, who argue that *Lego-lego* is tied to ancestor's veneration or death rituality, most local leaders maintain that the art expresses gratitude, joy, and cheerfulness (Adriana Tunliu, field interview with elders and participants, Alor-Pantar, May 4, 2022; Soleman Tang, Rudolf Haan, and Fredrik Lahal, WhatsApp group message to the author, February 28, 2023).

3 In the Abui language, *Lego-lego* is referred to as *lukkiai* and *mayai*. The term *lukkiai* derives from two words – *luk* (lit. bow, respect, conform, and abide) and *kiai* (lit. to sing, to utter or offer) – thus conveying meanings of embracing, standing shoulder to shoulder, and communal self-help or mutual cooperation. Meanwhile, *mayai* (lit. people holding hands) designates the *Lego-lego* dance performed collectively by the

Observed during harvest festivals and ceremonies, communities integrate Islamic and Christian messages into the dance without displacing Indigenous structure. Originally tied to harvest and rites of passage, *Lego-lego* demonstrates adaptive incorporation of Abrahamic elements while preserving its inclusive ethos.⁴

To analyze this dynamic, this paper engages Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg's *Religious Co-Production* (RCoP) framework, emphasizing mutual transformation among religions.⁵ It extends the RCoP beyond textual archives to embodied, oral, and performative practice, resonating with Izak Lattu's proposal for oral-based interreligious engagement and Mery Kolimon's findings on boundary negotiation and hybrid identity in Timor Barat.⁶ *Lego-lego* mediates Muslim-Christian encounter: Even when Indigenous ritual remains largely unchanged, shared performance fosters interfaith cooperation, ethical interaction, and cultural continuity.

II. Methods and Fieldwork

This study combines library and archival research with ethnographic fieldwork to examine *Lego-lego* as a mediating ritual among Indigenous, Muslim, and Christian communities in Alor-Pantar. Archival and ethnographic sources provided historical, theological, and cultural context for interpreting the dance's evolution. Library research analyzes Christian and Muslim settlement histories, Indigenous practices, and ritual texts, situating *Lego-lego* within broader patterns of religious co-production.

A key methodological strength of this study lies in the author's over 25 years of immersive participation in *Lego-lego* and related communal practices

community on the beach. See Petrus Ly, "Makna Edukasi Dari Simbol Dan Gerak Pada Tarian Tradisional Lego-Lego Masyarakat Alor Kampung Takpala Di Desa Lembur Barat Kecamatan Alor Tengah Utara Kabupaten Alor," *Gatra Nusantara*, Vol. 20, No. 1, April 2022, 22.

- 4 Rasyid P. Lewa, *Lego-lego Dalam Upaya Pemasyarakatan Dan Perbudayaan P4 di Kabupaten Alor*, (Pemda Alor, 1998), 2.
- 5 Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, "Co-produced Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam," *Harvard Theological Review* 118, no. 1 (2025): 159–80.
- 6 Izak Y. M. Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue: Orality, Collective Memory, and Christian-Muslim Engagements in Indonesia* (Brill, 2023); Mery Kolimon, "Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas: Eksplorasi Tema yang Muncul dalam Narasi Toleransi Beragama di Timor Barat," in *Costly Tolerance: Tantangan Baru Dialog Muslim-Kristen di Indonesia dan Belanda*, ed. Suhadi (CRCS [Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies], 2018).

through marriage to an Alorese community member. This extended engagement constitutes longitudinal participant observation, offering deep insight into the dance's social, ethical, and interreligious functions over multiple decades. Reflexively approached, this insider experience enables understanding of subtle practices, embodied knowledge, and relational dynamics that are often inaccessible to short-term researchers. These long-term insights are cross-verified with archival sources, interviews, and formal field observations, enhancing both depth and validity.

Fieldwork conducted in 2022 in Kabola involved participant observation during a Bible dedication ceremony and semi-structured interviews with elders, dance participants, and religious leaders. Observation documented *pantun adat*, *moko* drums, and communal formations, illustrating how Indigenous ritual principles – respect and cooperation (*lukkiai*) and unity through handholding (*mayai*)—facilitate interfaith interaction. One participant remarked, “*Lego-lego* brings us closer to each other,” highlighting its role in fostering cooperation without fundamentally transforming Indigenous practice.

Historical field experiences (1996–2000), while serving Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT) congregations, provide longitudinal insight. In Immanuel Folbo in 1996, Christians and Muslims collaborated to build a mosque, combining labor, food, music, and *Lego-lego* performance. In 1997, the Pura Island presbytery meeting involved similar cooperation, culminating in *Lego-lego* and *pantun* recitations that reinforced communal and interfaith bonds. These encounters illustrate that *Lego-lego* has long mediated Muslim-Christian cooperation while preserving Indigenous ritual grounding.

Methodologically, this study enacts Religious Co-Production (RCoP) by integrating Indigenous, Christian, and Muslim voices through archival, oral, and performative engagements, positioning research itself as a dialogical practice. It follows a dialogical, oral-based engagement model inspired by Lattu and Kolimon. Reflexive positionality—acknowledging the author's dual insider/observer role—guides interpretation and ensures relational accountability. By privileging oral, performative, and community-centered models of knowing, this approach resists extractive research paradigms and centers Indigenous epistemologies as active sites of theorizing. Insights derived from long-term participation are contextualized within community consent and cross-checked through interviews, demonstrating that both theoretical categories and Indigenous practices are co-produced through ongoing engagement.

By integrating archival research, historical observation, participatory ethnography, and interviews, the study situates *Lego-lego* as a living site of Religious Co-Production (RCoP). It demonstrates how Islamic and Christian practices are continually reshaped through Indigenous ritual participation, highlighting both historical and embodied dimensions of co-production, and showing that interreligious interaction emerges not only through doctrine but through shared performance, orality, and kinship networks.

III. Historical Context of *Lego-lego* and Interreligious Boundary Negotiation

Lego-lego, as a traditional art form, originates in planting and harvest ceremonies, rites of passage, and communal festivity. Performed in circular formations, it welcomes participation from all ages, genders, and religions. Ten to fifteen dancers move in unison, guided by *pantun adat* (oral poems) and the beat of *moko* drums, which symbolize ancestral wealth and collective well-being. Mistakes are corrected by briefly leaving and rejoining the circle, reflecting dance's pedagogical function in socialization, moral instruction, and communal negotiation.

At the core of *Lego-lego* are ancestral songs. One elder explained, "There would be no *Lego-lego*, without the meaningful pearls of wisdom of our ancestors in its songs."⁷ *Pantun adat* transmits values of stewardship, solidarity, and respect for the land, and solidarity. For example, the *Nuh Atinang* group that sings *Boling Jal Mi Wela*:⁸

Chanter:

Boling boling boling eee
Boling eee ... boling e
Boling ia mutu e benung ee jalmi welabae

King king oh king
 Oh king ... oh king
 Come raja, siblings, brothers, and
 sisters, oh [come to] enjoy the water

Respond

Boling oo hele loe o hloba o ee boling hele
ho
Ajae benung jalta ee ladil ee
Dobu noa ba e boling

Oh king, listen and obey
 Sweet is the taste of cotton flowers, all
 enjoy it; Let's all that enjoy it, rejoice
 together

7 Adriana Tunliu, field interview with elders and participants, Kabola, May 4, 2022.

8 Dince Kristina Lalel, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Karakter Tari Lego-Lego Suku Alurung Di Sanggar Tari Golu Gapung Kabupaten Alor," *Indonesian Journal of Performing Art Education* 1, no. 1 (October 2020): 1–17, 7; also Fredrik Lahal, WhatsApp message to the author, March 5, 2023.

Another refrain declares:⁹

<i>Liling liling leto liling liling</i>	[We're] different but still united
<i>Lalang lalang bali lalang lalang</i>	Diverse yet one
<i>Liling tela liling hena hena koro hena hena</i>	If united, we will be prosperous and good

These lines function as social pedagogy, cultivating unity in diversity, and as Kolimon notes, mediate flexible boundaries of identity, allowing participants to negotiate their religious, cultural, and communal belonging.¹⁰

With the arrival of Islam along the coast and Christianity in the interior during the Dutch colonial rule, *Lego-lego* incorporated new religious elements while retaining its Indigenous ethos. Islamic phrases and Christian moral teachings may now be recited, yet *pantun adat* remains the moral and spiritual core.¹¹ *Lego-lego* thus illustrates a long-grounded model of religious co-production: While external traditions are incorporated, Indigenous epistemologies or orality, performance, and kinship continue to shape the interfaith encounter.

A parallel case is Ilawe village, where interfaith cooperation is grounded in the *bela* oath.¹² Local myth traces villagers' descent from water eels and sea fish, reinforced by an oath "[From now on] until the end of the world, brothers and sisters, fathers and children should not hate [each other]; otherwise, [they will] die." In the mid-twentieth century, two sisters, one Muslim and one Christian, donated land, and the *bela* oath was reinterpreted as a binding agreement that Muslims and Christians must never divide.¹³

9 Thesa D. A. Djobo, "Makna *Tara Miti Tomi Nuku* bagi Komunitas Islam dan Kristen di Kabupaten Alor Ditinjau dari Perspektif Studi Perdamaian" (masters thesis, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, 2021), 126–127.

10 Kolimon, "Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas," 254–258.

11 Hamsah Epikorus Asakameng, "Kerukunan Umat Beragama Antara Islam dan Kristen" (*Sarjana* thesis, Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Indonesia Bagian Timur Makassar, 2016), 49.

12 Adriana Tunliu, field interview with the chief of Kabola subdistrict, online, March 6, 2023; see also Syarifuddin R. Gomang, "Muslim and Christian Alliances: 'Family Relationships' between Inland and Coastal Peoples of the Belagar Community in Eastern Indonesia," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 162, no. 4 (2006):468–489; Sastri Sunarti Yahya, *Mendengar Nenek Moyang Turun dari Langit: Motif Cerita Asal-Usul dari Alor, Pura, dan Pantar NTT* (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.55981/brin.406> and Merlin Tiran, "Kampung Ilawe: Beda Agama Membangun Masjid dan Gereja," *Perspective*, Pusat Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya (CRCS), Universitas Gadjah Mada, 8 November 2019, <https://crs.ugm.ac.id/kampung-ilawe-beda-agama-membangun-masjid-dan-gereja/>.

13 Tiran, "Kampung Ilawe."

This ethos guided the construction of the Darul Falah mosque and Ilawe church, built with mutual support, and symbolically linked local solidarity to the shared ancestry of Isaac and Ismail. Muslims assist with Christmas services, Christian celebrations include Muslim qasida groups, and interfaith marriages are common.¹⁴

Kolimon's framework helps illuminate how these practices actively negotiate religious and cultural boundaries. Intergenerational participants learn to respect differences while embracing hybrid identities: Muslim and Christian participants engage in *Lego-lego* without relinquishing their faith, yet simultaneously affirm communal unity and Indigenous ritual authority.¹⁵ Together, *Lego-lego* and the Ilawe case demonstrate that Indigenous songs, myths, oaths, and rituals are central in Alor-Pantar's interfaith harmony. They show that religious co-production in the region is not only textual or doctrinal but embodied, oral, and relational, rooted in local epistemologies that balance continuity and transformation.

IV. Religious Landscape of the Alor-Pantar

To understand the significance of *Lego-lego* as a mediating site of religious co-production, it is first necessary to situate it within Indonesia's broader religious and political framework and the distinctive interfaith dynamics of the Alor-Pantar archipelago.

Indonesia, where over 87 percent of the population identifies as Muslim, embodies a pluralist national identity grounded in *Pancasila*, the five foundational principles of belief in God, humanity, unity, democracy, and social justice. The national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity"), affirms this ideal of coexistence among multiple faiths and ethnicities.

Yet, scholars such as Sumanto Qurtuby note, religious diversity in Indonesia has faced persistent challenges.¹⁶ Since *Reformasi* (1998), episodes of marginalization, radicalization, and interreligious tension have marked several regions. Fundamentalist movements on both sides, Christian evangelical networks on university campuses, and Islamic organizations

14 Tunliu, field interview, online, March 6, 2023.

15 Kolimon, "Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas," 261–262.

16 Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Merawat Agama dan Kepercayaan Nusantara," in *Agama Dan Kepercayaan Nusantara*, ed. Sumanto Al Qurtuby and Tedi Kholiludin (Lembaga Studi Sosial dan Agama [eLSA] Press, 2019), v–xi. See also Suhadi, *Costly Tolerance: Tantangan Baru Dialog Muslim-Kristen di Indonesia dan Belanda* (CRCS, 2018).

promoting a *Khilafah* (modern caliphate), have intensified polarization and tested the limits of pluralism.¹⁷

Amid these national challenges, the Alor-Pantar archipelago stands out as a site of enduring interfaith harmony. Its history reflects the convergence of three religious worlds: coastal Muslim communities, interior Christian congregations, and the resilient Indigenous traditions grounded in animism and ancestral veneration, and oral cosmologies.¹⁸ Islam arrived via Bugis, Makassarese, and Arab traders who settled along the coast, bringing maritime prestige and transregional connections.¹⁹ Christianity, introduced under Dutch colonial rule, spread inland through missionary schools and the *Indische Kerk* network. Beneath and alongside these faiths, Indigenous beliefs in ancestral spirits, the Sky God (*dewa*), and Mother Earth remained vital, shaping the rhythm of daily and ritual life.²⁰

Before Dutch rule, Alor-Pantar was governed by Bunga Bali kings, whose alliances with the neighboring rulers were remembered through *pantun adat* sung in *Lego-lego*. One poem from Alor Besar recalls this symbolic geography:²¹

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- 17 Regarding evangelical networks on college and university campuses see, for example, Yayasan Mahanaim, The Joshua Project, Lampstand (Beja Kabuangahan), Partners International, Frontiers, the “Yoel Generation,” Inter-campus Christian Students (Perkantas), and the Indonesia Student Evangelical Institution (LPMI) actively promote evangelical missions, often targeting university campuses; see Izak Y.M. Lattu “Beyond Interreligious Dialogue: Oral-Based Interreligious Engagements in Indonesia.” *Intersubjectivity and Interreligious Studies* 10 (2019): 70–90, 77. For examples of Islamic organizations see, Ismail Marzuki, “Diskursus Khilafah dalam Kajian Fiqh Siyasah Klasik dan Kontemporer,” *Al-Manāhij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, 15, no. 2 (December 2021): 329–348; see also, Ahmad Muzakki, “Khilafah Islamiyah Antara Cita-Cita Dan Realitas (Kajian Atas Ayat-Ayat Tentang Pembentukan Negara),” *Proceedings of Conference on Strengthening Islamic Studies in The Digital Era*, vol. 1, no. 1 (September 2021): 14–26.
 - 18 Sastri Sunarti et.al, “Lego-lego: An Attempt to Cultivate and Nurture Plurality in the Alor Tradition,” in *Proceedings of the 1st Workshop on Environmental Science, Society, and Technology (WESTECH 2018), December 8, 2018, Medan, Indonesia, 1–11* (WAI / EUDL, 2019), 1, <https://eudl.eu/doi/10.4108/eai.8-12-2018.2283970>.
 - 19 Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel A. Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Studies in Christian Mission 35 (Brill, 2008), 75–76.
 - 20 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 73.
 - 21 Ismail Tamal Biat, “Nilai-Nilai Budaya Syair Lego-lego Di Desa Alor Besar,” *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 2, no. 1 (2017):12–20, 18; also, Alexander P. Pulinggomang, “Sistem Kekerabatan Sosial Masyarakat Desa Aimoli-Alor Dalam Relasi Islam dan Kristen,” (MSi. thesis, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, 2013), 51.

Eti-eti Bunga Bali inang Bunga Bali
Ali-ali Baorae amang Baorae

Eti-eti lefo Bunga Bali
Ali-lai fatang Baorae

Bunga Bali Taruamang
Tanglapui nemo suroleing

Boti Taruamang
Rua kakang amang

Taruamang tana kotong
Jaga tana kotong

Bunga Bali tana leing
Jaga tana leing

There is Bunga Bali, mother Bunga Bali
There is Baorae, father Baorae

There is Bunga Bali village
There is Baorae beach

Bunga Bali in Taruamang
Tanglapui [is] on the way down [the hill]

Carrying Taruamang
Two [are] siblings

Taruamang [is on] the highlands
Caring [for the] highlands

Bunga Bali [is on] the headland
Caring [for the] headland

As the poem suggests, Bunga Bali's domain stretched from "the bird's head to its tail," uniting the coastal Baorae (Baorae Watang) harbor and Taruamang consultative assembly.²² Tanglapui, nearby, was famed for its fertile lands. These kin-based alliances linked coast and mountain, harbor and headland, embedding power in shared responsibility for the land.

Islam entered this landscape through trade, but Indigenous spirituality remained robust. The result was a dual cosmology: ancestral and ecological spirits interwoven with transcendent deities, representing complementary male and female creative forces.²³ Christianity, introduced in 1901 with the baptism of Willem Hatsarani by Rev. J. F. Niks, gained institutional strength through the *Indische Kerk*, mission schools, and later Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT).²⁴ By 1939, the region counted 66,850 baptized Christians. Yet this expansion often entailed suppressing Indigenous practices, including *Lego-lego*, which was dismissed as "pagan" before being reinterpreted as a thanksgiving ritual.

22 "Head to tail" is a local metaphor for Alor Island, according to its shape, "a bird." See Eunike Molebila dan Delila Tanaem, "Tinjawuan Teologi Kontekstual Terhadap Konsep *Adang Bang Airnu*, *Ail Bang Tow*, *Pul Bang Itito* Serta Sumbangsihnya Bagi Penguatan Identitas Nasional Masyarakat Alor," *JURNAL LIK*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2019), 18, <http://ojs.untribkalabahi.ac.id/index.php/ejournal/issue/view/29>. Regarding coastal Baore see, Gomang, *The People of Alor and Their Alliances in Eastern Indonesia*, 16-22. For my understanding of Taruamang consultative assemble, I draw from Adriana Tunliu (field interview with Alor-Pantar elders, online, March 2, 2023).

23 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 74.

24 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 306.

The Japanese occupation (1942–1945) halted missionary activity and strengthened local Christian leadership.²⁵ After independence, GMIT inherited colonial structures, while *dakwah* and migration from Java and Sulawesi expanded Islam’s presence.²⁶ Though Christianity remained dominant, ancestral practices persisted beneath official religious identities. Baptism became a social marker of modernity, communion evoked healing power, and ancestral invocations coexisted with Christian prayers in funerary rites—illustrating how religious co-production unfolded in everyday ritual life.²⁷

Unlike other regions that saw violent conflict after the fall of the New Order, Alor-Pantar maintained peace. Its resilience derived not from state policy but from deeply rooted cultural traditions emphasizing mutual respect and ritualized engagement. Practices such as *Lego-lego* embody these values. Contemporarily performed at weddings, harvest festivals, and religious celebrations, *Lego-lego* encodes respect and cooperation, solidarity, as well as unity through handholding, cultivating coexistence through shared rhythm and movement.²⁸

Today, Alor Regency’s population remains roughly 75% Christian (71.71% Protestant; 3.09% Catholic) and 25% Muslim, with smaller numbers of Hindu and Buddhist minorities.²⁹ Yet these numbers obscure how many Alorese inhabit both *adat* and confessional worlds simultaneously—publicly Christian or Muslim while privately maintaining Indigenous ritual practices, ancestral offerings, and *mesbah* altars.³⁰ As Kolimon argues, such practices constitute negotiated boundaries of belonging, where faith and culture continuously reconfigure one another.

25 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 309.

26 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 310.

27 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 311; see also Kolimon, “Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas,” 249.

28 In Abui, *Lego-lego* is *lukkiai* and *mayai* (from *luk*, “to bow, respect, conform, abide,” and *kiai*, “to sing, to utter, offer”) evokes cooperation, while *mayai*, meaning “to hold hands,” symbolizes shoulder-to-shoulder solidarity. About solidarity, see Paulo Freire, et al., *Pedagogy of Solidarity*, (Routledge, 2014), 49–69. As Fraire explains, solidarity “requires that one enter[s] into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture...fighting the reality at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these “beings for another” ... is found only in the plenitude of ... act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis.”

29 See “Demografi,” Pemerintah Kabupaten Alor, accessed September 2025, <https://alorkab.go.id/x/demografi>.

30 Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Alor, *Kabupaten Alor dalam Angka 2023* (BPS Kabupaten Alor, 2023); Sunarti et al., “Lego-lego,” 14, and 4–5.

Joint acts of labor and celebration—mosque and church construction, shared festivals, and *Lego-lego* performances—illustrate how Indigenous ritual mediates Muslim-Christian relations. These are not mere gestures of tolerance but forms of active coexistence (*pro-existence*), embodying an epistemology of kinship and collaboration. As Lattu suggests, oral-based interreligious engagement sustains coexistence by embedding theology within performance and community practice.

Through these interwoven traditions, Alor-Pantar demonstrates that harmony is not the absence of conflict but the embodied co-production of difference—a living process where Islam, Christianity, and Indigenous cosmologies continually shape one another through shared song, gesture, and ritual movement.

V. *Lego-lego* as a Mediating Site of Religious Co-Production

To understand how *Lego-lego* operates as a site of religious co-production, this paper engages four interrelated theoretical trajectories. First, it draws on Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg's framework of Religious Co-Production (RCoP), which argues that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have historically formed and transformed one another through mutual interpretation, contestation, and adaptation.³¹ Second, it engages Diana Eck's notion of pluralism, which moves beyond diversity or tolerance toward active, dialogical engagement that generates new modes of shared meaning and ethical relationship. Third, it extends these global frameworks through Izak Lattu's concept of symbolic imagination, which locates interreligious encounter in the oral, performative, and affective dimensions of Indonesian cultural life. Finally, it incorporates Mery Kolimon's theology of lived tolerance (*toleransi yang dijalani*), which grounds coexistence in embodied gestures of mutual care, kinship, and cooperation. Together, these perspectives shift the analysis of RCoP from textual and institutional

31 See Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, "When Theology and History Think Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 50 (2026): 4–33, as well as "What Theology and History Can Offer Each Other When Thinking Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" (keynote lecture, *Journal of Interreligious Studies* Interreligious Zoom-Webinar, January 18, 2024), https://coproduced-religions.org/storage/publications/heyden-and-nirenberg_history-and-theology-jirs-2025.pdf; also see, Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, "Introduction: The Co-production of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," in *The Co-production of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Artefacts, Rituals, Communities, Narratives, Doctrines, Concepts*, ed. Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, CORE 1 (Brepols, 2025), 13–31.

domains to the oral, performative, and relational dimensions of Alor-Pantar life, where *Lego-lego* becomes both archive and choreography—an Indigenous enactment of pluralism through which Muslims and Christians continually co-create shared moral and spiritual worlds.

Heyden and Nirenberg describe religions as “co-produced,” continually reshaped through shared archives, symbolic exchange, and mutual engagement. *Lego-lego* exemplifies this process in embodied form: An Indigenous communal dance through which Muslims and Christians participate together in enacting solidarity and negotiating difference. Yet, while enabling Abrahamic co-production, *Lego-lego* itself endures as a stabilizing Indigenous tradition, mediating transformation without being absorbed.³² Kolimon calls a “negotiation of boundaries”—an ongoing process of becoming-with the religious other within a shared moral and affective world.³³ Here, Indigenous ritual does not merely host interfaith encounter; it choreographs it, offering an epistemology of coexistence grounded in movement, orality, and reciprocity.

The Co-Production of Religions: A Heyden and Nirenberg Lens on *Lego-lego*

Heyden and Nirenberg identify three core dimensions of religious co-production that guide our understanding of *Lego-lego*. First, they focus on the role of historical archives as reservoirs of shared narratives that continuously shape theological and cultural identities. These archives, including sacred scriptures, symbols, and stories, are reinterpreted over time by different religious communities in response to their evolving needs and contexts. Their shared nature provides a foundation for interreligious dialogue and transformation, fostering deeper connections, though sometimes also intensifying divides.³⁴ In the context of Alor-Pantar, *Lego-lego* exemplifies this principle, functioning as a living archive where Indigenous, Islamic, and Christian communities preserve and reinterpret collective memory through dance and *pantun adat*. This archive is not textual but performative, not preserved in manuscripts but in muscle memory, melody, and collective participation—precisely the kind of embodied archive that Lattu and Kolimon foreground in their analyses of oral and performative religiosity.

32 Heyden and Nirenberg. *The Co-production of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 15–17.

33 Kolimon, “Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas,” 247–248.

34 Heyden and Nirenberg. “What Theology and History Can Offer,” 3, 14. See also Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 11–16.

Second, Heyden and Nirenberg discuss mutual transformation, arguing that interactions between religious traditions dynamically reshape each other. Engagement across traditions often produces new theological and cultural forms, including hybrid beliefs and practices, challenging static notions of religious identities.³⁵ This mutual transformation resonates with Lattu's terms "symbolic imagination," the capacity of oral ritual to reimagine kinship and faith through shared symbols and performances. *Lego-lego* embodies this process, as Christian and Muslim participants join Indigenous communities in shared ritual, they negotiate and integrate values and practices, creating a fluid and interconnected cultural-religious identity. The dance, its rhythms, and its oral poetry become mechanisms through which these hybrid forms are enacted and experienced in real time.

Finally, Heyden and Nirenberg advocate for ethical engagement with this shared archive. While the historical and theological resources can foster interfaith understanding, they can also reinforce exclusivism if approached narrowly. They advocate responsible reinterpretation, urging communities to engage these archives with the goal of promoting harmony, reconciliation, and mutual respect.³⁶ Here, the ethical dimension intersects with Kolimon's notion of "lived tolerance" (*toleransi yang dijalani*), where interreligious ethics emerge from ordinary gestures of mutual labor, care, and ritual participation. *Lego-lego* translates such ethics into rhythm and movement, where equality and respect are enacted through the dance's open, circular formation.

The *Lego-lego* dance in the Alor-Pantar archipelago is a vibrant example of how cultural traditions serve as living archives, preserving and evolving shared values and narratives across generations.³⁷ Originating as an Indigenous practice, *Lego-lego* functions as a site where Christian and Muslim practices meet, interact, and co-produce new shared moral worlds. Where Heyden and Nirenberg emphasize textual archives, the Alorese *Lego-lego* demonstrates how the co-production of religions can also unfold through non-textual, sensorial, and kinaesthetic media. *Lego-lego* has historically been

35 Heyden and Nirenberg. "What Theology and History Can Offer", 5-6, 10. See also Heyden and Nirenber. "When Theology and History Think Together."

36 Heyden and Nirenberg. "What Theology and History Can Offer", 11-12. See also Heyden and Nirenber. "When Theology and History Think Together," 25-32.

37 Adriana Tunliu, interview with Kabola subdistrict head, via WhatsApp message, January 17, 2023: "We are in our 50s now, and we continue to experience the art of *Lego-lego* as really inspirational. Never once in our lifetime, and God forbid, Alor turns into a war zone, even if we are so diverse." Fredrick Lahal, Alor Regency Board of Education Head, and Mery Kolimon, GMIT moderator, offered similar testimony.

a site of communal cohesion, performed during key events such as harvest celebrations, rites of passage, and peace-making ceremonies. Its cultural formation, rhythmic movements, and *pantun adat* (oral poem) reflect a worldview rooted in interconnectedness and collective identity.

As the coastal communities embraced Islam and Christianity took root in the hinterlands, *Lego-lego* became a dynamic site of religious negotiation, weaving Indigenous, Islamic, and Christian values into a shared ritual space. This Indigenous framework mediates religious co-production, allowing Abrahamic traditions to engage dynamically without displacing the underlying cultural values. This transformation exemplifies religious co-production in real-time, as described by Heyden and Nirenberg, where traditions dynamically interact and reshape one another.

Today, *Lego-lego* continues to function as a living archive, embodying the principles of interfaith coexistence through its performance. The oral traditions embedded in the *pantun adat* serve as repositories of shared values, preserving communal memory and reinforcing the interconnected identities of Alor-Pantar's diverse population. The coexistence is beautifully captured in a *Lego-lego* poem "*Eti-eti Bunga Bali*" from Alor Besar. This oral poem and the like mirror the concept of a shared historical archive proposed by Heyden and Nirenberg, as it embodies the cumulative wisdom of Alor-Pantar's communities, shaped by centuries of interreligious interaction.

The practice of *Lego-lego* highlights the dynamic interplay of history and embodiment. As participants dance together—joining hands or linking arms in a circular formation—the dance physically enacts values of unity and mutual respect. The sounds of *moko* drums and the rhythms of the dance create a sensory experience that reinforces communal bonds. The dance's inclusivity, allowing participants from any background to join, reflects the hybrid nature of Alor-Pantar's cultural and religious identity.

The *pantun adat* further deepens this interplay by serving as a living repository where Indigenous spirituality, Islamic teachings, and Christian principles converge. For instance, a *Lego-lego* song from *Hamap* (a coastal people) goes like this:³⁸

38 Katubi, "Tara Miti Tomi Nuku: Merawat Toleransi Dalam Tradisi Di Alor, Nusa Tenggara Timur," *Masyarakat Indonesia* 44, no. 2 (December 2019): 1–16; Fredrik Lahal, WhatsApp message to the author, March 20, 2023; Matt Anie, WhatsApp message to the author, March 22, 2023.

<i>Bap sutafen tofangsa</i>	Grandmother gave birth to so many children
<i>Den Lifang lol den Adang lol</i> ³⁹	Some went to the beach, ⁴⁰ some to the mountain
<i>Humno'no na arabusi fasi</i> <i>Pinang alo nuelang</i>	Uniting the kinship between the two Sweet betel nut water, sweet coconut water
<i>Atut lol abib mahil ade</i> <i>nebuir lol bimahil ade</i>	The two of us are just one bond If you take a walk to the beach, you eat lamb If you join the walk to the mountain, you eat pork
<i>Autur min nasalang aput</i>	If you die first, then I will bury you in the Islamic way
<i>nanofemin sarani aput</i> <i>buku melang mo'eng bang lafeni</i> <i>dasing kota baru la iyo lele la timba hama hamala</i>	If I die later, bury me the Christian way They came from the village above Let's contribute together

This song illustrates the seamless integration of religious practices within the Indigenous ritual framework. The *pantun adat's* call-and-response style fosters communal participation, ensuring that the messages of solidarity and coexistence are collectively internalized and reaffirmed.⁴¹

By preserving ancestral values while incorporating elements of newer religious traditions, *Lego-lego* exemplifies how cultural practices actively mediate interfaith engagement and serve as living archives. This dynamic reflects what Kolimon calls “narrating identity” (*menarasikan identitas*): The retelling of self and other through shared practices that continually redraw

39 In the Kabola language, the words for this stanza would be: “*Bapang sota, sota tabang sahi. Wani liwang, liwang adang dola. Dena adang dola*,” Matt Anie, WhatsApp message to the author, March 22, 2023.

40 “For the *Nuh Atinang* group, they will add “pulau” (island) on the song,” Fredrik Lahal, WhatsApp message to the author, March 20, 2023.

41 Adriana Tunliu, interview with Sardin Lobang, Head of MUI of Kabola subdistrict, via WhatsApp message, January 17, 2023: “There are five mosques and 17 churches in Kabola, but we do not feel dismissed by our Christian sisters and brothers. We are first related by blood and marriage before choosing religion. We have lived in harmony since the time of our ancestors ... When we built our mosque, many Christians donated materials and money.” Rev. Taimenas, Protestant minister, similarly notes that “ignorance is something unacceptable in our society” and that “different religions are a common treasure, and all are encouraged to contribute positively to living together” (Adriana Tunliu, field interview, May 4, 2022).

the boundaries of belonging. Such adaptive storytelling and performance align with Heyden and Nierenberg's view of archives as transformative and fluid, allowing traditions to evolve in response to changing contexts. As a mediating site, *Lego-lego* enables Muslim-Christian co-production without compromising the integrity of Indigenous identity. It demonstrates that interfaith harmony is not merely a historical phenomenon but an ongoing, embodied practice that bridges past and present, creating spaces for mutual respect and shared identity in pluralistic societies.

While Heyden and Nirenberg primarily focus on textual and historical co-production, the *Lego-lego* dance of Alor-Pantar provides a complementary lens through which religious co-production can be understood in embodied practice. This ritual, which blends Muslim, Christian, and Indigenous elements, serves as a powerful illustration of how co-production unfolds not just through textual reinterpretation but also through embodied traditions. The inclusive nature of *Lego-lego* bridges the historical and lived dimensions of co-production, fostering a shared space where diverse religious and cultural practices converge in harmony and mutual respect. In this way, both historical archives and embodied rituals reflect the ongoing negotiation and transformation of religious identity within a co-produced religious landscape.

Building on its role as a mediating site, *Lego-lego* also illustrates how historical and embodied co-production operate together in real time. The dance functions as a living archive, where the values of interfaith coexistence are remembered but actively performed and negotiated. Originally an Indigenous tradition emphasizing communal solidarity and ancestral reference, *Lego-lego* adapted with the arrival of Islam and Christianity, becoming a site where diverse values and beliefs were harmonized, fostering a hybrid cultural and religious identity in Alor-Pantar.

Participants join hands or link pinkie fingers (in some areas, embracing shoulders), in a circular formation, moving rhythmically to the sounds of gong, *moko* (drums), and *pantun adat* (oral poems).⁴² The *pantun adat* acts as a repository of communal wisdom, articulating themes of unity, interconnectedness, and mutual respect. The following lines from the Alila village encapsulate the shared identity of Alor-Pantar's multireligious communities:⁴³

42 Lewa, *Lego-lego Dalam Upaya Pemasyarakatan*, 2; Fredy Lahal, WhatsApp message to the author, January 15, 2023.

43 Adriana Tunliu, explanation of a *Lego-lego* song from East Alila Village, Kabola subdistrict, with Indonesian translation assistance from Soleman Duka and Fister Lobang, online interview, March 2, 2023.

*Pidiai mamenu kafaing
Tumhei tafuning nu aley
Lamehorok doi taanlol
Den buildon udeng til mel den tangamen
mopfo miliwang
Tarifu husa elemek a'hal
Mit tedun helto to malil
Umasigi bang palola
Mang tanai omle midek
Mang tanai omle mite*

We are siblings, bound by one womb,
One placenta, one umbilical cord.
Some journey to the heights of mountains,
While others wander through
every valley.
Partly Christian, partly Muslim,
We do not deny, nor do we fight.
In the village, we climb to visit,
To the mosque on the beach, a sacred
home,
Entered with reverence, not carelessly.

The Abui people express a similar sentiment:⁴⁴

*Pilanuku piwea nuku beti anuku hawali
Adio bapil onhe
Atenghu pil hawali
Wala fuimiya
Wala abumiya*

We share one blood, both red and white,
Connected by a single womb,
By the Creator and our ancestors,
Who sent us forth, united,
Partly by the beach, partly by the
mountain. You own the shore, thriving
by the sea, While I cultivate cassava
and sweet potatoes high.
From my sea, you draw fresh water,
From my mountain, we gather
sustenance, one since the beginning.

These oral traditions resonate with Heyden and Nirenberg's notion of shared archives, preserving and transmitting the collective memory of coexistence across generations. Beyond its historical significance, *Lego-lego* embodies the principle of mutual transformation by blending elements of Islamic, Christian, and Indigenous spirituality. Dancing together requires physical synchronization, emotional alignment, and shared participation, fostering a sense of solidarity that transcends doctrinal differences.

The ethical dimension of co-production is also evident: Elders leading the chants emphasize inclusion and respect, ensuring the dance remains a unifying force. In East Alila Village, the lyrics such as "Partly Christian, partly Muslim; We do not deny, nor do we fight" explicitly affirm the community's commitment to peaceful coexistence.⁴⁵ In this way, *Lego-lego*

44 Zet Michael Mailani and Rode Mabilegi, WhatsApp group message to the author, March 22, 2023.

45 Sunarti et al., "Lego-lego," 6.

models how embodied practices can enact ethical reinterpretation of shared histories, reflecting the dynamic interplay of faiths described by Heyden and Nirenberg.

Having established how *Lego-lego* enables mutual transformation through embodied participation and shared narratives, we now turn to the ethical dimensions of this co-production, examining how inclusion and respect are enacted in practice. Through embodied practices like *Lego-lego*, participants engage in a form of lived theology, experiencing transformation at both personal and communal levels. The physical act of dancing together requires emotional and social alignment, fostering a collective sense of belonging. In East Alila Village, for example, *Lego-lego* often includes visiting both the mosque and the church, symbolizing mutual respect and the harmonious blending of religious practices.

The adaptability of *Lego-lego* highlights its transformative potential: Participants bring their own beliefs and traditions into the dance, creating a space for negotiation and integration. The call-and-response style of the *pantun adat* ensures that every voice is heard, producing a dynamic dialogue that reshapes both individual and collective identities. This ongoing, reciprocal engagement reflects Heyden and Nirenberg's insight that reinterpretation is not linear but continuously reshapes communal and religious boundaries.

By blending Christian, Islamic, and Indigenous values, *Lego-lego* demonstrates that mutual transformation is rooted in embodied practices, extending Heyden and Nirenberg's framework beyond textual archives into lived experiences. The inclusive ethos depends on equitable participation, yet power dynamics inevitably influence whose voices are heard and whose traditions are prioritized. Addressing these dynamics is essential to ensuring that *Lego-lego* remains a genuinely participatory and ethically grounded practice.

Building on these ethical foundations, *Lego-lego* not only embodies interfaith coexistence but also foregrounds the ethical labor required to maintain it. The dance demonstrates that ethical engagement is both participatory and ongoing, requiring humility, reflexivity, and sensitivity to contested interpretations within the shared archive. By intertwining Indigenous, Christian, and Muslim traditions, *Lego-lego* creates a living space where coexistence is also performed, reinforced, and negotiated in real time.

The concept of hope and humility, as articulated by Heyden and Nirenberg, is vividly enacted in *Lego-lego*. Hope emerges in the dance capacity to provide a shared space for mutual respect and reconciliation,

while humility is reflected in the community's deliberate acknowledgment of diverse traditions, including references to both Islamic and Christian burial practices. Lyrics such as, "If you die first, then I will bury you in the Islamic way; If I die later, bury me the Christian way," exemplify how participants actively honor multiple faiths, turning ethical principles into lived experience.⁴⁶

Yet *Lego-lego* also highlights the ambivalence inherent in co-production. While it fosters unity, it is simultaneously a site of contestation, where differing interpretations, regional practices, and perceptions of religious purity can create tension. Ethical engagement, therefore, involves not only inclusion but also negotiating power dynamics and ensuring that marginalized voices, such as women, minority groups, or less dominant sects, are represented within the shared ritual.

The dance's embodied nature further reinforces ethical learning. Physical acts of linking hands, forming circles, and responding to rhythmic cues cultivate solidarity and mutual responsibility, demonstrating that ethics are enacted, not merely taught. The *pantun adat*'s call-and-response structure ensures that every participant is heard, fostering an egalitarian approach to moral negotiation and reinforcing the communal ownership of the co-produced archive.

Ultimately, *Lego-lego* expands Heyden and Nirenberg's framework by showing that ethical engagement with shared histories thrives in lived, participatory practices. The dance transforms historical and theological tensions into opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and reconciliation. Through continuous negotiation, embodied participation, and collective interpretation, *Lego-lego* exemplifies how communities can sustain pluralism ethically, translating hope, humanity, and historical awareness into enduring practices of coexistence.

***Lego-lego* as a Mediating Site of Religious Co-Production: Integrating Diana Eck's Pluralism**

Reading Heyden and Nirenberg's concept of co-produced religions in conversation with Diana Eck's framework of religious pluralism highlights a shared emphasis on interfaith inclusivity and the transformative potential of Indigenous wisdom. While Heyden and Nirenberg focus on the historical

46 The *pantun adat* from *Hamap* quoted earlier in Section V, "The Co-Production of Religions" subsection.

interactions and shared archives, Eck augments this by highlighting the significance of lived encounters among diverse faiths, showing how traditions dynamically interact in shared spaces of learning and coexistence.⁴⁷ In the context of Alor-Pantar, *Lego-lego* exemplifies this perspective, integrating Indigenous traditions alongside Christian and Islamic elements to create a site of ongoing dialogue and mutual transformation.

Unlike frameworks that center solely on blending major religions, Eck's pluralism underscores the foundational role of Indigenous traditions. Elements such as the *pantun adat*, ancestral songs, and respect for the natural world are central to *Lego-lego*, forming a bridge between past and present and inviting participants from multiple faiths to engage with shared ancestral wisdom. The call-and-response style of the dance facilitates participation and dialogue, reflecting Eck's vision of interreligious encounters rooted in relational understanding.

For example, a song from the southern part of Alor expresses this ethos:⁴⁸

*Kolele lang watah,
Rasa lang watah*

When things are heavy [we] both lift
When it's light [we] carry it together

This emphasizes reciprocal solidarity: community members are called to give and receive care.⁴⁹ Similar principles are expressed in Kabola's sayings, such as "*tara mihi tomnu* ("sitting together with one heart") and *pi mong tara no'o* ("we treat each other well"), which encourage presence, mutual support, and communal responsibility during challenging times.⁵⁰ These practices extend Eck's vision by showing that interfaith engagement is not only dialogical but also grounded in ancestral and place-based connections.

Another *Lego-lego* song of the Abui people reinforces this sense of shared humanity:⁵¹

47 Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Beacon Press, 2003).

48 According to Mailani, "this poem is often symbolized by coconut trees or a traditional house, so that when a local person sees these, they are reminded of the poem," Zet Michael Mailani, WhatsApp message to the author, March 23, 2023.

49 Welhelmina Selfina Beli, "Modal Sosial Dalam Budaya Tarian Lego-Lego Masyarakat Alor Nusa Tenggara Timur," *Seminar IQRA* 1, no. 1 (2017): 522–549, 534; also, Zet Michael Mailani, WhatsApp message to the author, March 23, 2023.

50 Rev. Kondrad Penlaana, WhatsApp message to the author, March 23, 2023.

51 Djobo, "Makna *Tara Miti Tomi Nuku*," 103; Rode Mabilegi, WhatsApp message to the author, March 22, 2023.

<i>Tara miti tara tanga</i>	Different place, different language
<i>Tara aremang tomi nuku te</i>	Yet, [our] heart is one
<i>Buaka peka tayai faring hoba dar</i>	Far and near [are] many friends
<i>Pi nehe lanuku</i>	Yet, [our] name remains one
<i>O ... Alor tomi nuku te naya mama</i>	Let's unite o Alor; mother; father; all sisters
<i>nefela faring e</i>	and brothers
<i>Reyme pisama tangi te piwe kariang hopuna</i>	Let's talk and walk together
<i>Hayok sama pi hayoke bang pila tanimbag</i>	When things are heavy, let me help you lift
	when it is light [still] let's carry together
<i>Alor hane dodaliala hehang hesama pi peida</i>	Alor; the name, continues to thrive you and I
	are happy together

Additionally, *Lego-lego* songs reinforce these values, celebrating intergenerational solidarity, care for outsiders, and mutual responsibility:⁵²

<i>Ite kakang aring</i>	We are older and younger siblings
<i>Tobo eti foto tobo ali watang gere eti uma</i>	Some build houses in the mountains
	some at the beach
<i>Ite kakang aring dodo feling baleleng</i>	We are older and younger siblings
	sharing a place to live
<i>Ote opung no anang</i>	Outside/outsideers are our beloved
	relatives
<i>Hate ta tei tena tou</i>	In the sea, we are in the same boat
<i>Ite dei dare larang tou</i>	On the land, we journey one path
<i>Ite kakang no aring</i>	We are older and younger siblings
<i>Ite opung no anang</i>	We are outside/outsideers the beloved
	relatives
<i>Ite ra tou nana tou</i>	We come from the same blood
<i>Tale tou tafune tou</i>	We originated in one womb
<i>Inga go kakang no aring</i>	Remember we are older and younger
	siblings
<i>Inga go opung no anang</i>	Remember we are outside/outsideers
	the beloved relatives
<i>Mene ite jadi tou</i>	Let's unite
<i>Pana feleng leing hama-hama</i>	Let's walk together
<i>Lelang ite lafo tana lafo tana dike sare</i>	[Let's] build our hometown [let's]
	make it a better place

52 Djobo, "Makna *Tara Miti Tomi Nuku*," 103.

These verses convey interconnectedness, collective care, and the ethical obligation to one another.⁵³ They illustrate philosophical concepts passed through generations, such as *tenang eli mule noa* (friendly living ensures safety and peace), *taume anuku, takalli anuku* (one heart, one bond, let's build our hometown), and *ovo min aivetang* (sacrificing for future generations), echoing Eck's emphasis on relational pluralism.

By incorporating Eck alongside Heyden and Nierenberg, *Lego-lego* can be understood as both a co-produced archive and a living, embodied practice of interfaith pluralism. It demonstrates that Indigenous traditions are not peripheral but central to fostering dialogue, solidarity, and ethical engagement, offering a powerful model of harmonious coexistence in pluralistic societies.

VI. *Lego-lego* as a Mediating Site of Religious Co-Production: Orality, Ritual and Symbolic Imagination

Lego-lego functions as a mediating site of RCoP, bringing Christians and Muslims together for shared ethical and theological reflection. While Heyden and Nirenberg locate co-production within shared archives of scripture and theology, Lattu and Kolimon invite us to consider how such archives are not only read but danced, sung, and performed. In Alor-Pantar, where religious tradition is embodied, negotiated practice rather than fixed doctrine, *Lego-lego* demonstrates how oral, communal practices sustain dialogue, co-creation, and theological reflection across religious boundaries. This perspective opens a conversation with Lattu's analysis of orality, highlighting how *Lego-lego* exemplifies the ways in which oral, symbolic, and participatory practices shape interreligious engagement and theological reflection.

Lattu argues that orally-oriented societies engage across faiths primarily through stories, songs, and rituals rather than textual or elite dialogues.⁵⁴ In Maluku, *kapata* (Malukan folksong) and ritual performances transmit memory and solidarity, creating what he calls a people's dialogue embedded in oral practices.⁵⁵ *Lego-lego* shares the same principle: *Pantun adat* and

53 Waamanah Hamap Demang, "Eksistensi Tarian Tradisional Lego-Lego Sebagai Alat Pemersatu Masyarakat Suku Kabola Di Desa Kopidil Kecamatan Kabola Kabupaten Alor Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur" (undergraduate thesis, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, 2019), 18.

54 Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue*, 62, 176–177.

55 Lattu discusses *kapata* extensively in Chapter 2, titled: Folksong, Oral Narrative,

communal rhythms provide a structured yet flexible medium through which Indigenous, Muslim, and Christian participants interact. During the 2022 Bible dedication in Kabola, participants danced in an open circle, reciting *pantun adat* that narrated ancestral history and ethical teachings. Much like *kapata* in Maluku, *Lego-lego* becomes a performative dialogue across faiths, where rhythm, poetry, and movement create shared meaning without recourse to elite theological exchange.

Symbolic imagination is central to Lattu's approach, which he terms "symbolic-imagined interreligious engagement." Emerging from symbolic action and collective imagination, such engagements demonstrate that interaction with others does not always require physical encounters but may unfold through shared myths, rituals, and symbols.⁵⁶ In Maluku, the myth of *Nunusaku* symbolizes a common ancestry for Muslims and Christians, enabling the imagination of siblinghood despite conflict. Bedtime stories, the *cuci keramat* ritual, and the *tujuh syawal* feast are examples of how domestic and public spaces nurture kinship relations through imagination and memory, embodying a sense of *rasa orang basudara*—the feeling of being siblings.⁵⁷

Lego-lego's oral poetry reinforces a similar dynamic. Lyrics such as "We are siblings, bound by one womb" (*Pidiai mamenu kafaing* in Alila language) articulate an interfaith vision of belonging, while the circular formation and hand-holding (*mayai* in Abui tradition) physically embody connection and kinship. Just as Malukan practices of symbolic imagination sustain Muslim-Christian solidarity, *Lego-lego* enacts interreligious and intercultural bonds through embodied symbols and oral performance. As Lattu notes, Malukan interreligious engagement "illustrates the function of collective imagination, shared values and symbols, and collective memory in interreligious relationships," offering a model for societies where oral traditions remain central.⁵⁸ Through these symbolic practices, Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous participants enact social and spiritual bonds, aligning closely with Lattu's notion of symbolic imagination as a vehicle of unity performed through the body. In dialogue with Heyden and Nirenberg's concept of shared archives, Lattu reconceives the archive as imaginative and sonic—

and Collective Memory. "*Kapata* works in Malukan society as 1) a tool of ritual performance, 2) a shared knowledge and experience of the past, 3) a communicative action, 4) and social integration."

56 Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue*, 59–60.

57 Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue*, 69–70.

58 Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue*, 171.

shaped by rhythm, sound, and memory—and *Lego-lego*, in this sense, performs precisely such an imaginative archive.

For Lattu, ritual is not merely ceremonial but functions as a form of collective memory. Commemorative rituals act as performative memory, sustaining the past through the recurring enactments that bind communities together. In his words, rituals “maintain the past in participant or group mentality through depictive representations of past events,” becoming “constructed re-enactments of the past.”⁵⁹ In Maluku, *kapata* folksongs and ritual performances transmit ancestral origins and kinship ties, embedding shared values within communal memory. By listening to songs and engaging in bodily movements, communities connect with their history, drawing strength to face present struggles. Rituals such as *panas pela*, where women recount the story of kinship alliances and children participate in the enactment, ensure that moral teachings are not lost but passed down to new generations. This continuity demonstrates how ritual functions both as memory and pedagogy, preserving social identity across time.

Lego-lego operates within a similar symbolic framework, serving as a living archive of memory and morality. Each performance is not only artistic but reenacts interreligious cooperation and Indigenous ethical principles. The beating of *moko* drums anchors the participants in ancestral rhythm, while *pantun adat* conveys teachings of kinship, reciprocity, and harmony, echoing what Lattu describes as the transformative power of recurring performance. Just as Malukan rituals recall and re-create the past in the present, *Lego-lego* embodies the same dynamic: Ancestral memory is ritually revived and ethical norms are reinforced through repetition. In this way, symbolic imagination and collective memory converge, enabling communities to sustain cohesion and reaffirm their shared bonds across religious and cultural boundaries.

Critically, Lattu challenges the elite-dominated model of interfaith dialogue, which is often confined to clerical or academic exchanges. He advocates instead for grassroots, inclusive engagement rooted in everyday practices.⁶⁰ *Lego-lego* embodies this inclusivity: Anyone, youth or elder, different gender, Muslim, Christian, or Indigenous, may join the circle. At Kabola in 2022, the open dance blurred boundaries of age, gender, ethnicity, and religious identity, exemplifying what Lattu would call a

59 Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue*, xxiv–xxv.

60 Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue*, 158–159, 163–165.

“people’s dialogue,” enacted in rhythm and movement rather than formal deliberation.⁶¹

By integrating Lattu’s insights, it becomes clear that *Lego-lego* is not only a mediating

site for Muslim-Christian co-production but also a performance, symbolic, and participatory medium that enacts interfaith understanding through oral tradition, collective memory, and inclusive ritual. This perspective complements the framework of co-production by foregrounding orality as the theological and social engine of pluralistic engagement, enriching our understanding of how communities negotiate difference and sustain unity in practice.

In dialogue with Indonesian scholars who foreground local epistemologies of interreligious encounter, this paper extends the RCoP framework through Mery Kolimon’s chapter, “Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas” (2018), published in the volume *Costly Tolerance*.⁶² Drawing on narratives from Christian Meto and Muslim Bugis communities in West Timor, Kolimon demonstrates that religious coexistence in Indonesia is not a stable achievement but an iterative, ongoing practice of negotiating and crossing boundaries through which these traditions are mutually produced. For Kolimon, tolerance is a lived process—an everyday labor of “narrating identity” through gestures of empathy, ritual cooperation, and social exchange. These acts, particularly among women who attend each other’s funerals or assist in community labor, reveal an interreligious ethics grounded in orality, kinship, and relational memory rather than in doctrinal uniformity. Kolimon’s emphasis on women’s participation, emotional labor, and domestic ritual extends the idea of co-production into spaces often excluded from theological discourse—echoing how *Lego-lego* itself, as a communal dance, is maintained through women’s songs, hospitality, and ritual labor.

Kolimon’s approach situates interreligious life within an Indigenous hermeneutic that complements and provincializes Heyden and Nirenberg’s textual emphasis. Where RCoP framework identifies co-production in scriptural and theological dialogue, Kolimon shows that it also unfolds through *cerita* (story), *adat* (custom), and embodied reciprocity. Her notion of boundary negotiating resonates with Lattu’s idea of oral-based interreligious engagement, yet adds a critical dimension of gender and power. Drawing on

61 Lattu, *Rethinking Interreligious Dialogue*, 166–167.

62 Kolimon, “Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas”; see note 6 above.

Mechteld Jansen's insight that "every act of boundary-making is an act of power," Kolimon exposes how interreligious relations are shaped by the politics of recognition and exclusion. Acts of crossing—such as women participating in the rituals of the other faith—are thus creative performances of agency that subtly reorder social and theological hierarchies.⁶³

This perspective illuminates how *Lego-lego* in Alor-Pantar likewise operates as a performative site of co-production. The dance gathers Christians and Muslim participants into a shared rhythmic space where religious boundaries are reconfigured through movement, song, and bodily synchronization. As in Kolimon's Timorese context, *Lego-lego* does not merely represent coexistence but enacts it—producing new forms of relationality and belonging that redefine what it means to be Christian, Muslim, or Indigenous. The Indigenous form of the ritual grounds and conditions this encounter, ensuring that global religions are continually reshaped through local rhythm, emotion, and kinaesthetic memory.

By placing Kolimon's and Lattu's insights in conversation with Heyden and Nirenberg, this paper advances a decolonial, Indonesian re-reading of the Religious Co-Production (RCoP) framework—one that foregrounds relationality, performance, and agency within asymmetrical power relations. *Lego-lego*, like the interreligious practices Kolimon describes, demonstrates that co-production is not only textual or doctrinal but embodied, affective, and communal. It unfolds in the dancing body, in oral narrative, and in the everyday gestures through which people negotiate life together across religious difference. This re-reading challenges the dominance of text-based or elite discourses in the study of interreligious encounter, showing instead that theology and coexistence are co-created in rhythm, gesture, and shared affect.

In this Indonesian interpretation, the co-production of religions is not a static intellectual category but a lived ethic—performed in song, enacted in dance, and remembered in the body. *Lego-lego* thus stands as both archive and performance, theology and choreography, an embodied hermeneutic through which communities continually remake faith, kinship, and coexistence in Alor-Pantar.

VII. Challenge and Implications

The sustainability of the *Lego-lego* dance faces significant challenges from

⁶³ Kolimon, "Menegosiasikan Batas, Menarasikan Identitas," 257–258.

modernity, radicalism, and shifting generational attitudes. These pressures reflect broader tensions in maintaining interfaith harmony within plural societies and illustrate the dual potential of shared histories to foster either unity or division, as noted by Heyden and Nirenberg. While they emphasize that historical archives can inspire both peace and conflict depending on how they are engaged, *Lego-lego* offers a living model for addressing these challenges through its inclusivity, adaptability, and ethical imagination.

Modernity and Changing Generational Perspectives

As younger generations in Alor-Pantar become increasingly shaped by urbanization and global media, traditional practices as *Lego-lego*, risk being perceived as outdated or merely performative heritage. This generational shift threatens not only the continuity of the dance but also the transmission of its interfaith ethic. If its values are detached from lived practice, *Lego-lego* could become a museum artifact rather than a living pedagogy of coexistence.

Yet modernization also presents opportunities. Digital platforms, educational, and tourism can reframe *Lego-lego* as a resource for intercultural dialogue rather than a relic of the past. Integrating *Lego-lego* into youth programs or promoting it through creative social media storytelling could revitalize its relevance. This aligns with Heyden and Nirenberg's call for responsible engagement with shared traditions—an approach that adapts ritual forms to new contexts while preserving their moral and spiritual core.

Rising Religious Radicalism

The growing influence of conservative religious movements in Indonesia—both Christian evangelicalism and Islamic fundamentalism—poses another challenge to *Lego-lego*'s hybrid and inclusive nature. Such movements often promote exclusivist theologies that Indigenous rituals as incompatible with “pure” expressions of faith. This ideological rigidity risks undermining *Lego-lego*'s function as a space of interreligious encounter, threatening to replace dialogue with segregation.

Despite these pressures, *Lego-lego* remains a counter-narrative to exclusivism. Its ritual inclusivity—where Muslims, Christians, and Indigenous participants join hands in circular dance—embodies what Heyden and Nierenberg describe as the ethical potential of shared archives. The *pantun adat*'s affirmation that participants are “partly Christian, partly

Muslim” demonstrates how orality and performance can subvert rigid identity boundaries and affirm coexistence as a lived ethic.

Implications for Interfaith Engagement

The resilience of *Lego-lego*’s highlights its potential as a model for pluralism grounded in embodied practice rather than institutional decree. Its call-and-response structure, where participants collectively chant “We are siblings, bound by one womb,” offers a sonic and physical metaphor for the relational nature of coexistence. This participatory dynamic enacts dialogue through rhythm and movement, ensuring that the practice remains responsive to social change.

The dual potential of shared histories, as identified by Heyden and Nirenberg, is clearly visible here. Misinterpretations or neglect of *Lego-lego*’s inclusive ethos could lead to its marginalization and the erosion of Alor-Pantar’s traditions of coexistence. Conversely, deliberate engagement with *Lego-lego* as a living archive can transform it into a pedagogical tool for peacebuilding—one that teaches reconciliation not through doctrine but through movement, memory, and shared emotion.

By grounding interfaith harmony in local wisdom, *Lego-lego* demonstrates how shared histories can be reimagined as ethical resources for contemporary pluralism. It reinforces Heyden and Nirenberg’s insight that archives are not static but dynamic, offering possibilities for both rupture and renewal. Ultimately, *Lego-lego*’s adaptability and inclusivity outline a decolonial ethic of coexistence, showing that the past, when embodied responsibly, can be a generative force for building a more harmonious future.

VIII. Conclusion

The *Lego-lego* dance offers a vital extension to Heyden and Nirenberg’s framework of religious co-production by emphasizing the role of lived, embodied practice in shaping interfaith relationships, while also resonating with Diana Eck’s vision of religious pluralism as active, participatory engagement with diversity. Whereas Heyden and Nirenberg foreground the interpretive and archival dimensions of co-production among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Eck highlights pluralism as a discipline of encounter—one that transforms coexistence into collaboration through shared practice and mutual transformation. *Lego-lego* thus relocates these

frameworks within an Indonesian epistemology grounded in orality, imagination, and relational performance. It demonstrates that pluralism, like co-production, is not confined to theological discourse or textual reinterpretation but is lived and enacted through rhythm, voice, and collective movement that continually reconfigures relationships in real time. Seen through this lens, *Lego-lego* becomes both a theological and cultural expression of pluralism in motion, embodying the dialogical spirit that unites diverse communities through performance and shared moral imagination.

Through its inclusive ethos, rhythmic movements, circular choreography, and *pantun adat*, *Lego-lego* functions as a living archive, preserving ancestral wisdom while generating new forms of solidarity and reimagining shared histories while fostering unity across religious and cultural divides. Lyrics such as “We are siblings, bound by one womb” and “Partly Christian, partly Muslim; We do not deny, nor do we fight” embody the communal values of coexistence and mutual respect. These oral traditions ensure that interfaith engagement remains dynamic and participatory, offering a tangible model for navigating pluralism in modern societies. In this sense, *Lego-lego* performs what Kolimon calls “narrating identity”—a dialogical process of becoming-with the other through story, song, and ritual. Simultaneously, it embodies Lattu’s notion of symbolic imagination, where coexistence is sustained not only through physical encounters but through shared symbols, memories, and affective bonds. These insights extend Heyden and Nirenberg’s idea of the “shared archive” into an imaginative and sonic register—constituted through rhythm, memory, and embodied performance.

By placing Kolimon’s and Lattu’s perspectives in conversation with Heyden and Nirenberg, this study advances an Indonesian re-reading of RCoP—one that emphasizes relationality, performance, and agency within systems of unequal power. *Lego-lego* thus shows that co-production is not only intellectual or textual but also embodied and communal, unfolding in the dancing body, in oral narrative, and in the everyday gestures through which people negotiate life together across religious difference.

Ultimately, *Lego-lego* challenges static conceptions of religious identity by revealing hybridity and fluidity as sources of strength. It reaffirms that religious co-production is an ongoing, lived phenomenon—performed in song, enacted in dance, and remembered in the body. As a model of inclusivity and mutual transformation, *Lego-lego* demonstrates how Indonesian Indigenous traditions can enrich global theories of coexistence by foregrounding interfaith ethics in embodied practice, ancestral memory, and the imaginative co-creation of community.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Building on the insights gained from this study of *Lego-lego* as a dynamic model of religious co-production, further research can deepen understanding of how traditions like this adapt, endure, and foster interfaith coexistence in changing contexts. The following directions draw from the intersecting insights of Heyden and Nirenberg, Eck, Lattu, and Kolimon, ensuring that future scholarship continues to develop an Indonesian framework for studying religious co-production.

- **Textual-Performative Interplay:** Investigate how communities integrate historical religious texts and theological narratives (as emphasized by Heyden and Nirenberg) with embodied practices like *Lego-lego*. Comparative studies could explore how oral and performative archives complement written ones in shaping Muslim-Christian relations across Southeast Asia.
- **Narrating Identity and Boundary Negotiation:** Drawing on Kolimon's idea of *menarasikan identitas* ("narrating identity"), future research could examine how rituals like *Lego-lego* function as sites of ethical negotiation—where communities continually rearticulate belonging and difference. This includes exploring the decolonial potential of Indigenous traditions to reframe interreligious dialogue from local epistemologies.
- **Symbolic Imagination and Orality:** Expanding on Lattu's concept of symbolic imagination, studies could analyze the affective, sonic, and narrative dimensions of rituals that foster interfaith empathy and kinship. Ethnographic attention to rhythm, gesture, and memory may reveal how oral traditions sustain coexistence beyond institutional frameworks.
- **Globalization and Youth Engagement:** Explore how globalization, education, and digital media influence young Alorese perceptions of *Lego-lego*. How do online platforms, tourism, and heritage discourses reshape the dance's interfaith ethos? Such studies could assess whether digital storytelling becomes a new form of "imagined archive."
- **Gender, Participation and Power:** Examine how gender roles within *Lego-lego* shape interreligious collaboration, leadership, and cultural transmission. Feminist and postcolonial readings could uncover how women's participation in ritual song and movement embodies Kolimon's vision of dialogical agency.
- **Rituals of Healing and Reconciliation:** Investigate the potential of *Lego-lego* and similar embodied practices to mediate post-conflict

reconciliation. Drawing on Lattu's emphasis on affective solidarity, research could explore how shared rituals build trust, repair ruptures, and nurture long-term peace in plural societies.

- **Ethics, Ecology, and Coexistence:** Analyze how ethical principles embedded in Lego-lego—mutual respect, reciprocity, and environmental stewardship—can inform contemporary frameworks of interfaith ethics. This may link local ecological cosmologies with Heyden and Nirenberg's idea of practice co-production as a moral and relational practice.
- **Policy and Preservation:** Assess how state, religious, and educational institutions can support the preservation of Lego-lego as a living, interfaith practice. Policy studies could explore how heritage initiatives can balance safeguarding tradition with ensuring its organic evolution within communities.

Adriana Tunliu

Claremont School of Theology, Artha Wacana Christian University



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ARTICLE

Interposed Christology and Primal Sacrifices: Christianity Encountering the Mizo Tribe in India

Billy J. Zorinthara

Abstract

This paper explores religious interactions beyond the Abrahamic traditions and the Mediterranean Basin, focusing on the encounter between Christianity and primal religion (*sakhua*) among the Mizo tribe in India. The missionary engagement with the Mizo tribe during the late 19th to mid-20th century, and the revival movements (*harhna*), serve as a historical case study, highlighting how contextual theology built a bridge between the two religious traditions. In the absence of shared scriptures and history, the shared worldview between the two religious traditions played a decisive role in their interactions.

Precisely, this paper examines how interposed Christology functioned as a point of contact between the Christian doctrine of atonement and Mizo Primal Sacrificial Interposed Christology therefore refers to the contextualization of Christ as the conqueror of evil spirits and death within local sacrificial systems, particularly *khal* (sacrifice to evil spirits) and *khuangchawi* (eschatological feast and rituals). This involved both a reinterpretation of Christology through indigenous lenses and its insertion into local religious frameworks, realized through two modes of contextualization—intended and unintended (organic adaptation). Additionally, this paper considers how these modes challenge and nuance Heyden and Nirenberg's co-production theory, as the encounter, primarily involved Christology transforming local religious frameworks, even as indigenous elements were incorporated to express it.

Keywords

Mizo, interposed Christology, contextualization, primal religion, atonement

“[F]ar from being antagonistic, primal religions and Christian faith sometimes have possessed a special affinity.”
—Robert Eric Frykenberg¹

Introduction

The term *Mizo* came into common usage in the twentieth century to refer collectively to related Zo-speaking indigenous groups in modern-day Mizoram, replacing the older external labels such as *Lushai*. The Mizo ethnic group and their related tribes (*Zo hnathlak*), together known as “Mizo-Kuki-Chin,” are found across South Asia, including Northeast India and Bangladesh, as well as in the neighboring country of Myanmar in Southeast Asia. Their encounter with Christianity through missionaries in the late 19th century provides a unique context for examining how religious traditions, such as Christianity and primal religion, interact in this part of the world. This article focuses on the period from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, a crucial phase in Mizo history marked by interreligious encounters between Mizo primal religion (*Sakhua*) and Christianity. These encounters occurred first through missionary efforts and later through revival movements (*harhna*), which will be the focal points of our historical case study. At the outset, it is important to clarify that the term “primal” is commonly used in the Mizo context, and India at large, to refer to traditional or tribal religions. Its usage here carries no connotation of primitivism or inferiority.² Additionally, while the Mizo and their related tribes (*Zo hnathlak*) inhabit various geographical regions, including Bangladesh, Northeast India, and Myanmar, this article specifically focuses

- 1 Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 459.
- 2 Billy J. Zorinthara, “Spirit in Creation: Mizo Primal Cosmology and Its Implications for Anthropogenic Climate Change Concern,” *Studies in World Christianity* 30, no.1 (March 2024): 117–118.

on Mizoram in Northeast India, the homeland of the Mizos and where the majority of them reside.

This article begins with a brief synopsis of the Mizo traditional religion (*sakhua*) to establish the religious landscape of our historical case study. It then explores how Christianity encountered Mizo primal beliefs, first through missionary engagement and later through revival movements (*harhna*). Finally, we reflect on how this encounter between primal religion and Christianity may line up with or diverge from the “theory of co-production” as proposed by Heyden and Nirenberg.³

Spirits and Sacrifices in an Enchanted World

The Mizo people have never ascribed the founding of their religion to any specific figures or leaders. In contrast to religions like Abrahamic religions and others, which rely on written scriptures and canonical texts for direction, the Mizos did not have such written text to shape their understanding of God or theology. Instead, their comprehension of the divine or theology was influenced by personal experiences and oral traditions that had been passed down through generations since time immemorial. The Mizo traditional worldview is an enchanted worldview where there is no clear-cut dichotomy between the supernatural and the natural. Spiritual forces and entities were part of everyday life. The Mizo word “*sa-khua*,” which is now used as an English equivalent for “religion,” originally in the traditional sense means the worship of God (*Pathian*), who is a benevolent Spirit. It is a compound word of “*sa*,” which refers to a family or clan-based ritual, while “*khua*” is a communal ritual directed to this good Spirit. The Mizo also believed in a guardian spirit known as *Khuavang*, who is sometimes identified as the equivalent of the supreme being or “God above” (*Chung Pathian*), and a benevolent spirit known as *Lassi*, who is believed to be the overseer of feral

3 By “co-produced” religions, Heyden and Nirenberg “mean that these traditions, in all their sectarian variety, have always formed, reformed, and transformed themselves through interacting with, thinking about and imagining each other, and continue to do so” (Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 50 (2026), 7. Furthermore, this co-production and “co-dependence” emerges not only from “their shared reservoir and competing canon of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives,” but also from the fact that “the historical as a mode of knowledge has itself proven fundamental to each of the three religions not only at their origins, but in every moment of their existence” (Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 7), i.e., their shared *history* is a source of co-production.

creatures. While these benevolent spirits are believed to dwell near human beings and animals, they also believed that celestial beings are residing up in the sky or heavens such as *Vanchung nula* (a maiden who dwells in the heavens), *Vanhrika* (lice of the heaven), and *Pu Vana* (grandfather of heaven), all these celestial beings are considered benevolent beings.⁴

Alongside these celestial and benevolent entities, the Mizos believed in the existence of malevolent spirits (*huai*) whom they regarded to be the reasons behind all their sicknesses (demonic etiology). These spirits are believed to dwell in various locations; consequently, the Mizo ascribed them names according to their inhabitant. The one that dwells in the river and springs is called “*tui huai*” or “*sih huai*” (“*tui*” meaning water), while the one whose habitat is the jungle is called “*ram-huai*” (“*ram*” meaning jungle). Likewise, every waterfall, gigantic tree, and large boulder is the “abode of evil spirits,” to whom fowls and animals are sacrificed “to ward off the undesirable consequences of their bad temper.”⁵ Due to this bad temper, some of these spirits are considered to be easily offended when trespassing into their territories. The first local Mizo newspaper, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, translated as “Mizo and Plain People Newspaper,” reported many eyewitness accounts of spirit possession and affliction. In October 1903, one such report described an old woman who fell ill after collecting firewood in the jungle, requiring a piglet sacrifice (*vawk khal*) to alleviate her condition.⁶ Such cases were not uncommon. In 1898, Chalthangi from Lalbuta village was similarly afflicted by a jungle spirit (*ramhuai*) while gathering firewood.⁷ Also, in 1906, a report from Vaihleia village showed that numerous evil spirits resided around the area, particularly near small springs (*sih*) and hills.⁸ Additionally, in Pangzawl village, a woman became mute after returning from the jungle, believed to be possessed by a *khawhring*. Another account from the same region described a woman being possessed (*zawl*) after catching crabs (*chakai khawrh*).⁹ Crabs live in water, and the Mizo people often associate spirits with bodies of water such as springs and rivers (*sih huai* or *tuai*

- 4 Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival as the Cultural Response to Westernization in Mizoram* (Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge [ISPCK], 2007), 64.
- 5 Reginal A Lorrian, *Pioneering Lakherland: The Wonderful Story of the Lakher Pioneer Mission*, 5th ed. (Lakher Pioneer Mission, 1920), 7.
- 6 Dokhuma, “Ramhuai,” *Thu, Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, October 1903, 11.
- 7 Chhinga, “Ramhuai Man Thu,” *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, September, 1904, 7.
- 8 Bawla and Dorikhuma, “Ramhuai Thu,” *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, May 1904, 6.
- 9 Bawktea, “Ramhuai Thu,” *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, October 1904, 6–7.

huai). Thus, this is likely the case of *tuai huai* or *sih huai* (spirits residing in the water). Possession (*zawl*) was not limited to sickness; there were occasions when possessed individuals would sing or speak in another language, particularly *Pawih*.¹⁰ This language, also known as *Lai*, is primarily spoken in Lawngtlai district of Mizoram, as well as in the Hakha and Falam areas in the neighboring state of Myanmar.

The people were therefore living in constant fear of these spirits, and this belief lies at the core of their sacrifices to evil spirits. At this juncture, it must be emphasized that the Mizo sacrifice to evil spirits is not a “worship of these spirits,” as posited by some missionaries, but rather an attempt to appease the malevolent entities believed to have caused sickness.¹¹ Hence, this particular kind of sacrifice is practiced only in times of sickness.¹² So, when someone fell sick, they would consult the local priest or medicine man known as *bawlpw*, and sometimes an individual known as “*khuawang zawl*” (possessed by *khuawang*). The *bawlpw* would typically diagnose the disease by examining the patient’s pulse.¹³ He would therefore make a sacrifice on their behalf.¹⁴ *Khal* was the name given to this kind of sacrifice, but it may also take a wide variety of forms, depending on the kind of animal that was offered. For examples, sacrificing of fowl like cock was called *ar khal*, a goat was called *kel khal*, and so on.¹⁵ *Ar* means cock while *kel* means goat hence the sacrifice (*khal*) is named after the required animals. When offering the sacrifice, the medicine man would chant a verse passed down “from one generation to another, to drive away the spirits.” The bodies of the sick persons or patients will be “painted with pungent-smelling spices,” as it is believed that the spirits “dislike the smell of spice.” In some cases, the sick person would also be given a “fresh dog’s blood” to drink, over which the priest “chanted to drive the spirits away.”¹⁶ According to an eyewitness

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- 10 Thangluaia, “Ramhuai Thu,” *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lekhhabu*, October 1904, 7–8.
 - 11 R.A. Lorrain, *5 Years in Unknown Jungle for God and Empire*, reprint (Tribal Research Institute, 2012), 71.
 - 12 Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, Reprint (L.T.L Publication, 2004), 50.
 - 13 R. Vanlawma, *Ka Ram leh Kei*, 4th ed. (MLC Publication, 2022), 427; Zairema, *Lekhhabu Te Pasarih*, 2nd ed. (Zorun Community, 2011), 203; Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Tribal Research Institute, 1975), 110–111; D. E. Jones, *A Missionary’s Autobiography, 30 Years of Serving the Lord 1897–1926*, trans. H. Liansailova (Lengchhawn Press, 1999), 30.
 - 14 T. Vanlaltlani, *Tribal Religion: Mizo and Bru* (Lakshi Publishers & Distributors, 2016), 65.
 - 15 J.V. Hluna, “Pre-Christian Religion of the Mizos,” in *Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India-The Mizos* (Directorate of Higher and Technical Education, 1992), 36.
 - 16 Vumson, *Zo History: With an introduction to Zo culture, economy, religion and their status as*

account, some people received healing through these animal sacrifices, but some couldn't be healed and eventually ended up very poor.¹⁷ They ended up poor because animal sacrifice is expensive and burdensome for the average person. Based on the diagnosis made by the medicine man, people need to purchase animals like goats, hens, and pigs, and they ardently believe in the effectiveness of their sacrifice, so "they are fully prepared to incur debt to provide sacrificial animals."¹⁸ The Lakher tribe in southern Mizoram also resorted to sacrificing domestic animals and birds to evil spirits, which they believed were the cause of illness when someone fell sick.¹⁹ The plight caused by evil spirits, therefore, affects the victims' socioeconomic well-being.

Besides these sacrifices, the extravagant feast and ritual known as *khuanghawwi* connected to their eschatological belief further intensified their predicaments. Unlike sacrifices to evil spirits, this ritual is performed to the *Khua* God. The Mizo believed that the spirit or soul of the deceased person would travel to the underworld known as *mitthi khua* (abode or village of the dead). When someone died, they would slaughter an animal to be consumed on the day of the burial (*thlaichhiah*). According to tradition, the animal's spirit would escort the deceased person's spirit into the underworld.²⁰ Someone called Pawla, whose wife is Sanui, guards the gate of the underworld (*mitthi khua*). He is armed with a catapult and uses it to shoot anyone who enters if they have not performed certain good deeds and rituals during their lifetime.²¹

In the same underworld, there is an apartment called "*pialral*," a place of bliss, akin to paradise. Nevertheless, gaining entry into this place is incredibly challenging for the common people. Because it is set aside only for people who earned the title known as "*Thangchhuah*." This is a title given to men of valor who slayed wild animals like bears, snakes, elephants, etc., and such brave men were also called "*ram lam a thangchhuah*," the Mizo words "*ram lama*" emphasize the notion of how one earns such a title by hunting in the jungle.²² These men were entitled to cross the threshold and rest in the *pialral*

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- an ethnic minority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh* (published by the author, 1987), 17.
- 17 Jones, *A Missionary's Biography*, 34.
- 18 J. M. Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram* (Synod Publication Board, 1991), 51.
- 19 Lorrian, *Pioneering Lakherland*, 7.
- 20 James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, rev. and enlarged ed. (R. Vanlarawna, 2021), 307-308.
- 21 Zaliana, *Mizo Sakhua Kumpinu Rorel Hma* rev. and enlarged ed. (Tribal Research Institute, 2013), 16.
- 22 J. Meirion Lloyd, *On Every High Hill* (Synod Publication Board, 1984), 15.

(paradise) in the afterlife.²³ The title could also be earned by those who performed the *khuangchawi* feast, which was possible for the wealthy people, and is called “*in lama thangchhuah*.” The words “*in Lama*” emphasize the idea of how the title is earned in the community or village rather than through hunting. Such people earned the title by providing a ceremonial feast known as “*khuangchawi*,” which was impossible for common people due to its cost. For example, it required one female and two male *gayal*/*mithan*, and two pigs, alongside local rice beer (*zu*) for the whole community.²⁴ Additionally, it was not a one-time public feast but included other feasts and rituals such as “*Sakung, Chawng, Dawino Chhui, Sedawi Chhun, Sechhun, Sekhuan, and Mitthi Rawp Lam*.”²⁵ Very few people were able to organize and perform such a feast and ritual because of its prohibitive costs.²⁶

Though the chief purpose of the feast and ritual was to gain access to *pialral* (paradise) in the afterlife, it also had a bearing on one’s social standing in the present life. People who organized the feast and performed the ritual were honored and distinguished from others, earning the right to “wear striped cloths and turbans” decorated with “king crow’s feathers.” They were also “allowed to have windows in their houses,” a privilege denied to others.²⁷ Common people treated such individuals with greater respect than others because they were considered socially distinguished.²⁸ The extravagance of this practice, however, reveals that the salvific path to *pialral* (paradise) provided by the traditional *khuangchawi* was ultimately an economic burden for the poor and common folk.

Christological Reimagination, and Sacrifices: The Interactions

It was within this religious landscape that the missionaries were challenged to rethink their Christological homily. Christianity was introduced to the Mizos by the Arthington missionaries (who later joined the Baptist missionary society) and the Welsh missionaries during the late 19th century. William

23 Zaliana, *Mizo Sakhua*, 17.

24 The “*Gayal*” or “*Sial*” (Mizo term), also known as “*mithun*” or “*mithan*,” is a large species of ox native to Bangladesh, Northeast India, Myanmar, and other parts of Asia. Regarding pigs see, C. Chawngkunga, *Sakhua* (Art and Culture, Government of Mizoram, 1997), 50-51.

25 See B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin* (published by the author, 2009), 4 3.

26 Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* (L.T.L. Publication, 1938), 49.

27 N.E. Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (Firma KLM Private Limited on Behalf of Tribal Research Institute, [1928] 1976), 94.

28 Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, 95.

Williams, a Welsh missionary, made a brief visit in 1891 but succumbed to illness.²⁹ Three years later, Arthington missionaries from Leeds, namely, J. H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, reached Mizoram in 1894.³⁰ They were members of High Gate Baptist Church in North London but served with the Arthington Mission, a non-denominational mission founded in England by a millionaire, Robert Arthington.³¹ They committed themselves to their missionary work for roughly three and a half years, but since Arthington wanted his missionaries to move quickly from one place to another, they eventually departed to the neighboring tribe in Arunachal Pradesh and transferred their tasks to the Welsh Mission.³² In 1897, D.E. Jones, followed by Edwind Rowlands in 1898, from the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, arrived to fill this void, laying the foundation for what would eventually develop into the Mizoram Presbyterian Church.³³ Later, Lorrain and Savidge, the former Arthington missionaries, returned to Mizoram in 1903, and this time they were sent by the Baptist Mission Society, establishing a Baptist Church in Southern Mizoram, while the Welsh missionaries were assigned to Northern Mizoram.³⁴

Initially, the missionaries' kerygma contained certain Christological motifs, such as Jesus as the one who cleanses sins; the one who dwells in heaven and becomes human; the gracious one, as well as a healer of sickness, and a forgiver of sins. These theological messages can also be seen in the first Mizo Christian songbook, published by the missionaries in 1899, which contains 18 hymns carefully selected from Western hymnals and translated into the Mizo language.³⁵ Typically, though the missionaries regarded the Mizo local religion as paganism or devil worship, they still saw the Mizo sacrificial practice as an archetypal pattern foreshadowing the death and resurrection of Christ. In 1901, Edwin Rowlands, a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary, saw a Mizo medicine man offering a sacrifice to a malevolent spirit on behalf of a young girl who had fallen ill. Reflecting on

29 William Williams: *Mizoram Chanchin Tha thlentu hmasa ber* [William Williams: *The First Missionary Who brought the gospel*] (Synod Executive Committee, Mizoram Presbyterian Church, 2013), 4–16.

30 M. Eleanor Bowser, *Light on the Lushai Hills: The Story of a Dream that Came True* (The Carey Press, 1928), 10.

31 See Dorothy Glover, *Set on A Hill: The Record of Fifty Years in the Lushai Country* (Edinburgh Press Ltd, 1944), 6.

32 Glover, *Set on A Hill*, 8.

33 John Hughes Morris, *The Story of Our Foreign Mission* (Hugh Evans & Sons, 1930), 80–82.

34 *Pu Buanga* (J.H. Lorrain) *Log Book 188–1936*, 69.

35 *Mizo Kristian Hla Bu* (Eureka Press, 1899), 1–36.

this sacrifice, he wrote, “In all this, we can see some *foreshadowing* of the meaning of those words: Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22 [RSV]).”³⁶ He also wrote, “[T]here is no question but that this system points to the sense of need which exists for the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”³⁷ Another missionary, Jones, shared an experience when visiting Chief Suakhnuna. At the Chief’s house, they sang the hymn, “What can take my sins away? Nothing but the blood of Jesus?” After the song, the Chief said, “This is the reason why we used to sprinkle blood,” referring to the sacrifices made by traditional priests through the sprinkling of animal blood.³⁸ The notion of shedding blood seemed to intrigue the missionaries, as their Christological proclamation was initially centered on the cross, which they emphasized as the means of forgiveness and the cleansing of sins. Llyod, a Welsh missionary, also notes, “The blood sacrifices had prepared their minds for the need of Christ, the perfect sacrifice.”³⁹

Nevertheless, despite the missionaries’ optimism, such a homily did not strike a chord with the wider populace for at least two reasons. First, as Lorrian wrote in his 1913 report, “But the people had no sense of sin and felt no need for such a Saviour.”⁴⁰ Because none of the Mizo traditional sacrifices have such an idea. Among the neighboring tribes, such as the Nagas, it has also been observed that “there is no concept of a forgiving god.”⁴¹ This was also the case with the Mizo. Nevertheless, this does not mean that God was never seen as forgiving. The Mizo traditional concept of God included merciful and gracious attributes (*Pathian in zah a ngai ang*). The issue was that Christian doctrine, such as God forgiving the sins of humankind through the shedding of blood, was entirely foreign. Such a notion also baffled the Mizo people, as Pachuau rightly observes, “The people were amazed to hear about the kind of magic there was in such blood. The missionary was quick to learn that he had to change his message.”⁴² Second, the pervasive fear of malevolent spirits kept the Mizo

36 Emphasis added to Hebrews quotation. Also see, Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram*, 51.

37 Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram*, 51.

38 Jones, *A Missionary’s Biography*, 71.

39 J. Meirion Lloyd, *On Every High Hill* (Synod Publication Board, 1984), 78.

40 *Reports by Missionaries of Baptist Missionary Society (B.M.S.), 190–1938* (Mizoram Gospel Centenary Committee, 1993), 93–94.

41 Sashinungla Pongen, “‘I Perceive that in Every Way You Are Very Religious’ (Acts 17:22): Naga Spirituality and Baptist Mission,” *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 2 (2016): 291–310, 297.

42 Lalsangkima Pachuau, “Intercultural Hermeneutics: A Word of Introduction,” *The*

people from readily accepting Christianity, as they believed that converting would anger the evil spirits.⁴³ They would eagerly ask, “Is Jesus stronger than *ramhuai* (evil spirit)?”⁴⁴ Jones, a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary, also wrote, “The first difficulty which the Lushai⁴⁵ raise against accepting Christianity is the anger that he will be killed by the evil spirits.”⁴⁶

As the fear of malevolent spirits kept the Mizo from readily embracing Christianity, the missionaries were challenged to reshape their Christological message. Thus, Christ as a “vanquisher of devil/evil spirits” became the point of contact, as Lorrain notes in his report.⁴⁷ In this “interposed Christology,” Pachuau observed that Jesus is portrayed as an exorcist who ultimately conquers these malevolent forces or the devil.⁴⁸ This idea cohered with the work of Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén, published in 1931. The patristic Atonement theory, especially as expressed by Irenaeus, according to Aulén, understands the Christian doctrine of soteriology as a cosmic conflict in which Christ triumphs over evil spirits. He further argues that ignoring, undermining, or suppressing this perspective could distort the whole picture of the atonement. This cosmic drama, in his words, “[I]s the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory—Christ—Christus Victor— fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the “tyrants” under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.”⁴⁹

So, when the missionaries reframed their Christology in the context of the local sacrifice to evil spirits, it resonated more with the Mizo people. As Jones wrote, “[S]ome are ready to believe in Christ if they will be kept from illness. Any sickness that they cannot understand is attributed to evil spirits. The Lushais are fond of hearing that Jesus Christ has conquered the Devil

Asbury Journal 70, no. 1 (2015): 8–16, 10.

43 K. Thanzaupa, ed., *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1897–1957* (Synod Literature and Publication Board, 1997), 4.

44 Zairema, *Pi pule biak hi* (Zorun Community, 2009), 2.

45 The Mizo tribe was earlier called ‘Lushai’ by Western colonizers and missionaries. However, the name refers only to a subgroup of the Mizo people rather than the entire tribe.

46 Thanzaupa, *Reports of the Foreign Mission*, 4.

47 Baptist Church of Mizoram, *The Annual Reports of BMS*, 94.

48 Lalsangkima Pachuau, “Mizo ‘Sakhua’ in Transition: Change and Continuity from Primal Religion to Christianity,” *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 1 (January 2006): 41–57, 51.

49 Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert, 2nd pressing (SPCK, 1970), 4.

and Death.”⁵⁰ He “would go about the villages, preaching, singing, and telling people about someone who came down from the sky, went about doing good, healing the sick, raising the dead and being kind to children and women,” teaching them that God is greater than all evil spirits that He would heal them, and that there would be no need to sacrifice to the evil spirits.⁵¹ Mendus, another Welsh missionary, also wrote about preaching to a group of men on the border of Burma, who were afraid of demons, telling them that Jesus is more powerful than demons.⁵² Lorrain also noted, in his logbook, that he often told people in several villages that “demons fear those who have God as their refuge.”⁵³ Lewis, also notes, “To the Lushai mind, Christ’s Resurrection appeals with force, for in that, he grasps the truth of the Son of the Good Spirit triumphing over all the powers of evil.”⁵⁴ In March 1903, when a meeting was held at the Shelthlun Chapel, several locals shared their testimonies about forsaking sacrifices to evil spirits. One elderly man recounted the persecution he endured after deciding to become a Christian and forsaking the practice of sacrificing to evil spirits, a ritual he had followed throughout his life. Another elderly man spoke of hearing about someone whose health was miraculously restored after renouncing such sacrifices and embracing Christianity. Encouraged by this story, he sold the goat (*kel*) he had planned to use for assuaging the spirits (*kel-khal*), embraced Christianity, and, upon doing so, also experienced a restoration of his health.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, it took more than just a simple re-interpretation of the Christological message to convince these locals; the message of “Christ the Victor” became more cogent with the modern Western medicine that they distributed. In 1908, medical missionary Dr. Peter Fraser inaugurated a dispensary, which continued its operations until 1912 and was then managed by a Mizo assistant.⁵⁶ Additionally, Lorrain and Savidge, upon their departure from Mizoram and their return to London, enrolled at

50 Thanzauva, *Reports of the Foreign Mission*, 4.

51 Mendus, “My Friend Chhuakhama,” in *Pastor Chhuakhama Chanchin leh Sermon*, ed. R. Lalsangliani (R. Lalsangliani, 2013), 119. Also see, Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram*, 48.

52 E.L. Mendus, *The Diary of a Jungle Missionary* (Synod Publication Board, 1984), 37–38.

53 Kyle Jackson, et al, eds., *Lorrain’s Logbook: Notes from a Missionary in Mizoram, Northeast India (1891–1936)*, (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2023), 118.

54 Grace R. Lewis, *The Lushai Hills: The Story of the Lushai Pioneer Mission* (The Baptist Missionary Society, 1907), 29.

55 Jackson, et. al, *Lorrain’s Logbook*, 97–98.

56 *The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram*, 18.

Livingstone College in 1898. There, they pursued studies in hygiene, tropical diseases, and surgery, and then established a dispensary upon their return. Initially, some locals thought that the medicine provided by the missionaries had some kind of magical power. Instead of swallowing it, they would put the pills under their pillow, hoping that they would be cured.⁵⁷ One Mizo pastor observed, “The Mizo have given up their sacrifices to the devils and have now taken up medicines like a duck to water.”⁵⁸ One Christian journal published in 1913 noted that modern medicine had ousted the office of the local priest and sacrifice, and the locals were pleased with the medicine they received from the missionaries because it healed them of their sicknesses.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it provided a better alternative to expensive sacrifices. For example, when Herbert Anderson, the then secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, visited the Southern part of Mizoram, one of the village chiefs expressed to him his wish to become a Christian, asserting that Christianity was “much cheaper” than sacrificing to the spirits. On another occasion, an elderly woman, who had become a Christian, told him that the pills were far cheaper than the thirty rupees she had previously spent on sacrifices.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the nomenclature for modern medicine in Mizo, still in use today, is “*damdawi*,” a compound word that combines “*dam*,” meaning “heal” or “cure,” and “*dawi*,” meaning “spell.” Similarly, the Mizo word for ‘hospital,’ “*damdawi in*,” literally means “house of a healing spell.” This mirrors Mizo’s initial perception of modern medicine as containing inherent healing power, akin to a spell (*dawi*).

While Christological reformulation, coupled with modern medicine, made constructive inroads, another significant factor that was at play in the widespread acceptance of the gospel was a series of revivals that began in 1906. In particular, from the third major revival in 1919 onward, an extensive inculturation of local religious elements, initially deemed paganism, like traditional drums, dance, and songs written in local tune, were integrated into Mizo Christianity.⁶¹ According to one eyewitness

57 See David Kyle, *Lorrain of the Lushais: Romance and Realism of the North East Frontier of India* (The Carey Press, 1944), 17; *The Annual Report of Baptist Mission Society 1901–1938* (Mizoram Gospel Centenary Committee, Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1993), 35, 133.

58 Zairema, *Lehkhahu Te Pasarih*, 2nd ed. (Zorun Community, 2011), 205.

59 Vaisam, “In-Thawi Thu,” *Kristian Tlangau*, February 1913, 229.

60 See Herbert Anderson, *Among the Lushais* (Carey Press, 1914), 18, 14; Vaisam, “In-Thawi Thu,” *Kristian Tlangau*, February, 1913, 229.

61 For a more detailed analysis of this inculturation, see Billy J. Zorinthara, “Forging a Third Space for Spirituality and Social Justice: The Dynamics of Mizo Revival Movements in Interweaving Christianity and Primal Religious Ethos,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (October 2023): 170–174.

account, during the revival movements, the fear of evil spirits and demons started to decline in his village, and people began to trust prayers and medicine for healing instead of the traditional costly sacrifices. Some primal religious practices, such as expensive feasts and rituals like *khuangchawi*, were cast off.⁶² This caused great concern among their non-Christian counterparts, who thought that casting off sacrificial elements would suffer from tragedies, sickness, and diseases. However, when no such misfortunes befell the Mizo Christians, they proclaimed, “Surely Jesus has triumphed over the evil spirits.”⁶³ During the same time, in the Southern part of Mizoram, around 500 individuals abandoned their practices of sacrificing to evil spirits.⁶⁴

Among some Mizo revivalists, the sacrifice of Christ was described as “*zawh za zo*,” which traditionally means “one who accomplished all the ritual requirements” including the most expensive eschatological feast (*khuangchawi*), the pathway to their *pialral* (paradise).⁶⁵ Hence, the sacrifice of Christ was seen not only as a triumph over the dreaded evil spirits but also as a way to overcome the torment in the underworld (*mitthi khua*) and a free pathway to paradise (*pialral*). Strom rightly notes, “The Mizo’s frequent blood sacrifices enabled them to comprehend Christ’s supreme sacrifice and the atoning power of his blood. Entrance to *pialral* and avoidance of “*Mitthi khua*” (hell) was possible through faith in Christ.”⁶⁶

With the displacement of traditional sacrifices, the offices of the traditional priests, such as *sadawt* and *bawlpw*, gradually fell out of place. Christian pastors became overtime the new religious leaders. This was not a direct substitution, since their roles and functions differed significantly. While the central role of the traditional priests was primarily limited to times of sickness and festivals, Christian pastors function primarily in preaching, teaching, evangelizing, leading communal worship, and officiating rituals. A unique form of Mizo Christian spirituality known as “*mihlim*” (ecstatic person) or “*zawlnei*” (prophet) also emerged during the revival movements. Though these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, a distinction is also maintained. The *mihlim* carries a broader sense of ecstatic religious

62 Lalhmuaka, *Zoram Thim ata Engah* (Synod Publication Board, 1998), 154.

63 Lalhmuaka, *Zoram Thim ata Engah*, 137.

64 *The Baptist Missionary Society: One Hundred and Twenty-Eight Annual Report 1919–1920* (The Society at Carey Press, 1920), 19.

65 Vanlalchhunga, *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran, Nilai leh Beihruah Thupui: Kohhran leh Zirtima Dik lo* (Synod Literature & Publication Board, 2020), 208.

66 Donna Strom, “Christianity and Culture Change Among the Mizoram,” *Missiology: An International Review* 8, no. 3, (July, 1980): 307–317, 312.

experience while *zawlnei*, who are also ecstatic, specifically means prophet. Both concepts come from primal religious concept of “*Khuawang Zawl*” (“being possessed by a benevolent divine Spirit”), where the possessed person functioned as an agent of revelation. As Pachuaui rightly observes, Mizo Christian spirituality “is closely linked to the idea of having a mysterious relation or connection with the unseen Spirit.” In this encounter, the benevolent divine spirit (*Khuawang*) in Mizo primal religion was reinterpreted as the Holy Spirit within Mizo Christianity.⁶⁷

Contextualization and Theory of Co-Production: A Reflection

Unlike Abrahamic traditions, where co-production emerges from shared texts/scriptures and history, Mizo Primal Religion and Christianity interact through resonance in worldview, particularly in concepts like the spirit world, sacrifice, and eschatology. This leads to contextualization, where Christianity is translated into Mizo religious categories. In our case study, two modes of contextualization could be seen. Firstly, the missionaries’ attempt to contextualize the gospel could be broadly described as “intended contextualization,” as there was a deliberate effort to relate the gospel to the Mizos. In this mode, we have seen how the missionaries were also challenged to rethink their initial Christological homily in light of the primal concept and practice of sacrifice. Secondly, the other mode is “unintended contextualization” as there was an unconscious incorporation (organic adaptation) of local cultural elements by the Mizo, especially, from the third revival movement onwards. Concerning the former, Donna Strom notes:⁶⁸

[M]issionaries to Mizo were contextualizing the Gospel message (and method) long before the neologism “contextualization” caught the fancy of the Christian world. Theirs was not the syncretistic accommodation of a “dialogue with truth,” suggested by John Hick, or the “Hinduized Christians theology” advocated by recent Indian theologians, whereby one selects the best insights of other religions, and seeks to evolve a higher truth. Nor was the message to Mizos the neo-orthodox or new-liberal “prophetic accommodation” to the historical moment—endeavouring to discern “where God is at work and calling us to participate in it,” as stated by Shoki Coe and liberation theologians. The Gospel message to Mizos was what

67 Pachuaui, *Sakhua*, 54.

68 Donna Strom, *Wind through the Bamboo: The Story of Transformed Mizo* (Evangelical Literature Service, 1991), 96–97.

Hesselgrave calls “apostolic accommodation”—the didactic method of proclaiming the unchanging supracultural truth of the inspired inherent Word of God in the context of an animistic world, with expectation that the Holy Spirit would use His Word to transform lives.⁶⁹

To be more accurate, the term “apostolic accommodation” is associated with Bruce Nicholls, and “apostolic adaptation” is the preferred term employed by Hesselgrave. “In any case, the primary emphasis [...] is conveying the received message of Scripture into the context of a respondent culture.”⁷⁰ This accommodation or adaptation approach, he contends, resonates with the etymology of the Latin word “context,” which means “to weave” or “to join together.” The scriptural message “superimposed upon culture without adaptation lacks meaning,” thus it should be “woven” with the “third horizon cultural materials.”⁷¹ In the case of the Mizo, as evident from the mission report, it was after the initial failure to communicate the message that the missionaries realized the need to rethink their Christological message.

Initially, the interaction between Christianity and the Mizo primal religion lacked the element of reciprocity, as it was only the missionaries who made an effort to contextualize. However, over time, during the revival movements, the locals began to unconsciously incorporate their primal religion and local elements into Christian practice, such as the use of local drums (*khuang*), dance, and the composition of new songs in local tunes. This unintentional contextualization or organic adaptation process aligns but also nuances the co-production theory because it was not just Christianity adapting to the Mizo primal sacrifice (*Christus victus*), but also the Mizo shaping Christianity in a way that made it uniquely their own. Christ became the exorcist or the medicine man (*bawlpū*) who triumphed over evil spirits. He also became the *thangchhuah pa*, who conquered the primal fear of death by becoming the *zawh za zo* (one who fulfilled the ritual requirements). Thus, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, for the Mizo, provided free access to *pialral* (paradise). This traditional notion of a place of bliss (*pialral*), which was once reserved for heroic figures and the wealthy, is transformed and now made accessible to the weak, the cowardly, and the poor. In this encounter,

69 Strom, *Wind through the Bamboo*, 96–97.

70 David J. Hesselgrave, “The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration and Communication,” *Journal of Evangelical Theology* 28, no. 4 (December 1985): 443–454, 452.

71 Hesselgrave, “The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration and Communication,” 454.

we observe a merging of worldviews and similar beliefs, yet Christianity provides the theological framework that transforms them. While co-production theory suggests that religious traditions actively refine or redefine each other, the interaction between Mizo primal religion and Christianity is largely unidirectional in terms of adaptation and contextualization. Even when bidirectional elements are present, contextualization often functions as a one-way process. This unidirectionality, however, is crucial not only for the missionaries but also for the Mizo people, because it brings liberation from the socio-economic burdens associated with traditional sacrifices to evil spirits (*khal*) and the costly *thangchhuah* rituals.

The primal-Christian interaction also lacked shared scriptures, as seen in co-production theory, since primal religions such as the Mizo tradition are based on oral transmission passed down through generations. However, they share overlapping worldviews. It is this overlapping worldview that makes a point of contact possible. Like the Mizo enchanted worldview, “the biblical worldview ... is thoroughly supernatural. God controls physical phenomena and all so-called natural laws.”⁷² Additionally, the Bible also acknowledges the existence of good and evil spirits, such as angels and demons.⁷³ In addition, the belief in the presence of a plethora of spirits in the Mizo primal worldview, such as the concept of “*huai*” where malign spirits have particular spatial locations along with a benevolent spirit known as “*Lasi*,” also resonates with what some writers have termed “territorial spirits.”⁷⁴ This idea, as Poythress put it, is the “association or confinement of evil spirits or angelic spirits to certain spatial locations or territories.”⁷⁵ Moreover, according to this biblical understanding of “spatial localization of spirits,” it argues that “only God is omnipresent” (Jeremiah 23:24), while “angels and demons alike operate in some spatially limited way.”⁷⁶ This idea aligns with the Mizo primal worldview, where God as *Khua* is understood to be omnipresent, while *Lasi*, the benevolent spirit, is confined to the jungles, as are the malevolent spirits.

This overlapping worldview played a crucial role, as both the missionaries and the locals imagined with each other, facilitating the building of bridges between the two religions. Over time, the organic adaptation

72 Sam Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: A Comprehensive Guide*, Kindle ed. (Zondervan, 2021) Kindle loc. 510.

73 Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare*, Kindle loc. 510.

74 Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare*, Kindle loc. 113 ff.

75 Vern S. Poythress, “Territorial Spirits: Some Biblical Perspectives,” *Urban Mission* 13, no. 2 (Dec. 1995): 38.

76 Poythress, “Territorial Spirits: Some Biblical Perspectives,” 40.

during the revival movements further strengthened this bond, leading to the incorporation of local elements and shaping a distinctly Mizo form of Christianity. As Pachuau also observes, the foundation of the Mizo church's strong emphasis on "charismatic experiences and spirit-led Christianity" lies in the traditional "spirit-centered worldview" that revolves around the belief in the presence of numerous spirits actively participating in their daily lives.⁷⁷ This belief in the existence of the supernatural and active spirits within human lives and society persistently finds "their continuity" in the charismatic revivals driven by spiritual experiences. This intrinsic connection between these elements played a crucial role in the rapid spread of Christianity among the Mizo people and in the emergence of Mizo indigenous Christianity.⁷⁸

Frykenberg made a similar observation in his studies of the tribal group elsewhere in India; he notes, "far from being antagonistic, primal religions and Christian faith sometimes have possessed a special affinity."⁷⁹ This similarity has facilitated people from primal religious backgrounds to navigate cultural change effectively: "turning to Christ what is already there and not a total denigration of one's past."⁸⁰ Likewise, unlike the "abandon theory," which advocates that the Mizo people abruptly abandoned their primal religion upon converting to Christianity, "subconsciously," they integrated "familiar symbols, their values, and worldview" into their newfound faith in Christ.⁸¹

In this regard, the appropriation of Christology in the Mizo context broadly aligns with H. Richard Niebuhr's typology of "Christ the Transformer of Culture," though it does not fit neatly within the model.⁸² This is because interposed Christology did not merely transform existing practices but also challenged the core beliefs. As discussed earlier, it challenged the idea that securing a place in paradise (*pialral*) depended on costly rituals (*khuangchawi*) and achievements such as slaying wild animals (*ram lam a thangchuah*). As a result, this Christological encounter also reflects

77 Pachuau, *Sakhua*, 51–52.

78 Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Primal Religious Spirituality and Charismatic Revivalism: The Mizo Christian Experience", in *Interconnectivity, Subversion, and Healing in World Christianity: Essays in Honor of Joel Carpenter*, ed. Afe Adogame and Aminta Arrington (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 198–200.

79 Frykenberg, "Christianity in India from Beginnings to the Present," 459.

80 Frykenberg, "Christianity in India from Beginnings to the Present," 459–460.

81 Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Indian and Christian: Historical Accounts of Christianity and Theological Reflections in India* (ISPCK, 2019), 149.

82 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1951), 190–229.

elements of the antithetical model, due to overlapping ideas in practice.⁸³ Thus, the appropriation of Christology in the Mizo context cannot be captured by a single typology. Nevertheless, the outcome of the encounter did result in a transformation of local religious culture.

A similar case is observed among the Chin in the neighboring country of Myanmar. The Chin people also have their own version of “interposed Christology.” Contrary to traditional Chin religious belief, which held that when someone died a violent or accidental death, vengeance had to be sought on behalf of the deceased in order to redeem the soul from the abode of the dead (*Sarhi-Khua*).⁸⁴ The violent death of Jesus on the cross came to be understood as cancelling the need for taking such revenge. In this way, “the substitute death of Jesus opened the doors for conversion, even for people who headed Chin religious and political institutions.”⁸⁵ Thus, in both the Mizo and Chin contexts, transformation of religious belief occurred through shared, though not clean slate, worldviews. This dynamic shows the limits of co-production as a theoretical lens.

Conclusion

Our case study shows that a shared worldview played a crucial role in the interaction between Christianity and Mizo primal religion, rather than shared scriptures and history, as found in co-production theory. In addition, co-production theory is less applicable in this historical context because the primal-Christian interaction was primarily unidirectional. Christianity dominated the theological and doctrinal framework, while primal religious elements, such as sacrifices, rituals, and eschatological views of life after death (*mitthi khua*, *pialral*, etc.) underwent significant changes. In all of this, interposed Christology played a central role in reshaping local primal religious beliefs. Christ became the exorcist and medicine man (*bawlpw*) who overcame the evil spirits. He also became the heroic figure (*thangchhuahpa*) who fulfilled all traditional ritual requirements (*zawh za zo*). Thus, the sacrifice of Christ alleviated their fear of evil spirits and death (*mitthi khua*), and provided free access to paradise (*pialral*). Despite its unilateral nature, the notion of “imagining with each other” is not absent in primal-Christian interaction, as similar dynamics can be observed. In a sense, the missionaries

83 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 47–82.

84 Lian H. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies [NIAS] Press, 2003), 234.

85 Sakhong, *In Search of Chin Identity*, 235.

reframed their Christological homily to align with primal sacrificial concepts, shifting the emphasis from cleansing and forgiveness of sins to Christ as the “conqueror of evil spirits.” At the same time, the locals adopted Christianity within their religious framework, incorporating indigenous expressions into Mizo Christianity, as Mizo songs written in previously prohibited local tunes, as well as traditional dance and drums, were incorporated and prioritized over Western musical instruments and translated hymnals. To this day, Mizo Christians continue to employ local cultural elements in worship to express their newfound faith in Christ. “Continuity and transformation” best describe the interaction between them. Continuity is evident in overlapping worldviews, while transformation occurs as Christianity provides the doctrinal framework, reshaping those worldviews. The dominance of Christian theology in this interaction may, in part, be due to the power imbalance, as it took place within the context of colonization. Yet, the liberating motifs of the theological message made it conducive and receptive to the locals. The fear of evil spirits, the burden of expensive eschatological *khuangchawi* feasts, and sacrifices to evil spirits for healing placed a significant strain on the Mizo tribe. Interposed Christology alleviated these *angst* and socio-economic hardships, offering a sense of relief and freedom.

Billy J. Zorinthara is a PhD researcher in *Intercultural Theology* at the Protestant Theological University (PThu) in the Netherlands. His research focuses on the *pneumatological turn* in Christian theology of religions.



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ARTICLE

Power Structure, Hegemony, and Marginalization in A Case of Religious Co-Production

Lailatul Fitriyah and Indah Roziah Cholilah

Abstract

Through the application and expansion of the concept of “religious co-production,” this paper aims to interrogate the co-producing dynamics between state-acknowledged religions (Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism) and an Indigenous belief (ancestral religion) that is not formally acknowledged by the state as a “religion” (Sapta Darma) in the East Javan village of Sukoreno. The paper focuses on two main questions, namely, how do we utilize “religious co-production” to understand the interreligious relations in the here and now, especially those practiced not through doctrinal discourses, but rather through the embodied, everyday lives? And how does the concept of “religious co-production” engage with the question of inequality of power in interreligious relations? In answering both questions, the paper argues that contemporary dynamics of religious co-production are not only shaped by doctrinal exchanges among different religious believers, but also through the combination of governmental policies, and majority-minority sociological dynamics in a locale. The paper also argues that power inequality within religious majority-minority relations normativize specific ways of living religiously, whilst alienating others. This means that an analysis of religious co-production cannot presume that religions shape and re-shape each other in an equal manner, but rather should see that ritual, theological, and social adjustments are demanded more from a minoritized religion and not from a dominant one. Furthermore, it also means that observations about power dimensions in religious co-production can shed light on how the hegemonic presence of a religion is buttressed by socio-

political, and economic processes that are often missed from a strictly theological and/or historical analysis.

Keywords

Religious co-production, religionization, normativization of hijab, power structures, Sapta Darma.

Introduction

The concept of religious co-production is critical in understanding interreligious relations at an epistemological level because it shows the porousness of religions that are often understood as singular entities that are exclusive of each other. Referring to the emergence of the concept from the past and present relations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg write: “We would go so far as to say that Jews, Muslims, and Christians cannot understand their own religious tradition without taking into account how it has been shaped by the other two, real or imagined, in the manifold moments of their co-produced history.”¹

Of course, critical accounts on interreligious relations between different religious traditions that go beyond mere dialogical encounters are common, especially in the fields of comparative theology and interreligious studies. Marianne Moyaert’s edited collection on interrituality, Jeannine Hill Fletcher’s study on interreligious encounters and relations among women from different religious traditions across the globe, and Jerusha Lamptey’s exploration on Muslim and Christian feminist thoughts through the lens of Muslima comparative feminist theology are few examples of what has been written about the intertwining relations between diverse religions in the world.² Nevertheless, religious co-production as a concept shows another layer of relationality between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam at a paradigmatic level: that it is not only inevitable, but has also constituted each

- 1 Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 50 (2026): 4–33, 15.
- 2 Marianne Moyaert, ed., *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interrituality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Motherhood as Metaphor: Engendering Interreligious Dialogue* (Fordham University Press, 2013); Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

religious tradition to the extent that one cannot be understood without the others.

Even so, the rootedness of religious co-production as a concept in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relations seems to limit the application of a concept that can contribute significant insights into the ways that interreligious relations occur. In order to understand this limitation, we ought to study the definition of religious co-production below:

By “co-produced religions” we mean that these traditions, in all their sectarian variety, have always formed, reformed, and transformed themselves through interacting with, thinking about and imagining each other, and continue to do so. This enduring co-dependence derives from two basic facts. The first is their shared reservoir and competing canon of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives. The second, more often forgotten, is that the historical as a mode of knowledge has itself proven fundamental to each of the three religions not only at their origins, but in every moment of their existence.³

It is true that in their fuller elaboration on the concept of religious co-production, Heyden and Nirenberg stated that it is not restricted to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.⁴ Nevertheless, it is the interrelations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that become the primary locus of the concept. This focus on the three religions is due to the historical hermeneutics practiced by their believers that take inspirations from and make use of the “shared reservoir and competing canon of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives,” and connect the past, present, and future of their traditions.⁵ Thus, the concept of religious co-production as conceived by Heyden and Nirenberg is an exploration of the interconnection between history and theology in which construction and re-construction of the meanings of religious histories constitute the lives of the faithful, the ways they perceive their religions, and the manners in which they build or detract their relations with the religious others.⁶

3 Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 7.

4 Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, “Co-produced Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” *Harvard Theological Review* 118, no. 1 (2025): 159–180, 162.

5 Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 7.

6 Heyden and Nirenberg, “Co-produced Religions,” 177, 180.

Looking at the possibilities to expand the application of the concept of religious co-production to another context outside of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relations, we propose to utilize the concept to observe the dynamics of interreligious living that are characterized by religious majority-minority relations in Indonesia. We specifically look into the case of interreligious relations in Sukoreno Village in East Java Province, where Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and the followers of an *aliran kebatinan/kepercayaan* (lit. spiritual/belief/faith stream) known as Sapta Darma have been living side-by-side for decades.

Aliran kepercayaan (lit. belief/faith stream) is a term rooted in the Indonesian Constitution Chapter 29 that delineates the place for religion within the life of the nation, and defines the national narrative on what classifies as “religion” and what is not.⁷ Before the term *aliran kepercayaan*, the term *aliran kebatinan* (lit. spiritual stream) was used by people both inside and outside the *aliran* communities to identify these groups of local religious sects that grew in Indonesia within the last decades of the 19th century up to the first half of the 20th century. However, since the term *aliran kebatinan* was associated with the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia/PKI) during the anti-communist purge in 1960s, the communities have redefined themselves as *aliran kepercayaan* by utilizing the word “faith” in Article 29 Clause 2 of the Constitution to seek protection from the state, and to legitimate their socio-political and religious presence in Indonesia.⁸ This identification was altered again in Post-Reformation Indonesia after 1998, in which *aliran kepercayaan* is heretofore known as *agama leluhur* (lit. ancestral religions), *agama asli* (lit. indigenous religions), *agama lokal* (lit. local religions), and *kearifan lokal* (lit. local wisdoms).⁹

7 Chapter XI Religion, Article 29 reads as follows: “1. The state shall be based on the One and Only God; 2. The state guarantees the freedom of every inhabitant to embrace his/her respective religion and to worship according to his/her religion and *faith* as such” (italic ours). The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, “The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia [and] Law of the Republic of Indonesia Concerning the Constitutional Court,” The Office of the Registrar and the Secretariat General of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015, 30.

8 Samsul Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi Agama Leluhur dalam Politik Agama di Indonesia* (Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies, 2017), 8.

9 Regarding *agama leluhur*: “Ancestral religions refer to local religious practices (material subject) that so far have been identified as practices of animist [belief], magic, *adat* (custom, tradition), culture, and others within the [Indonesian] public discourses and literature Some of these practices include [but not limited to] *semedi* (meditation), *sesajen* (giving offerings), pilgrimages to sacred mountains, forests, and rivers, *bersih desa* (rituals to clean the village from bad omen), and others” (Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 3–4). On *kearifan lokal* see Maarif, *Pasang Surut*

It is important to note that *agama leluhur* is a term that encompasses two different groupings of local religions. They are: *penghayat kepercayaan* (lit. those who embodied faith), and *masyarakat adat* (lit. adat societies/societies who live based on traditional customs).¹⁰ *Penghayat kepercayaan* can be differentiated from *masyarakat adat* to the extent that the latter is defined as: “Communities who live on land that has been passed down from generation to generation. They have territory and natural wealth. Their social and cultural life is governed by customary law and customary institutions that have continuously sustained them as a community.”¹¹ Consequently, the former alludes to local religious groups whose existence is not tied to any specific territory and customary institution. Sapta Darma belongs to this group. Although it is also important to note that the usage of the terms *penghayat kepercayaan*, *masyarakat adat*, and *agama leluhur* is not mutually exclusive in the context of Indonesian discourses on religion.

The shift in terms from *aliran kebatinan* to *aliran kepercayaan* to *agama leluhur* to refer to religious groups like Sapta Darma reflects the ambiguity of their presence within the national script of belonging in Indonesia. What is more,

Rekognisi, 3.

- 10 “Those who embodied faith” is my translation. Maarif himself prefers to use “belief” to translate “kepercayaan” into English. I chose to use “faith” for a smoother translation of “penghayat kepercayaan” into English. Furthermore, Maarif defined “kepercayaan” as, “the religions of specific groups and individuals registered with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MECRT), groups who have struggled for recognition of their *kepercayaan* as *agama* (Indonesian: religion) from the Indonesian state since the early Indonesian independence, and only succeeding in 2017 when the Constitutional Court (The Indonesian Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-VII/2016) approved their petition for religious recognition.” See Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity: Perspectives of Followers of Indigenous Religions of Indonesia,” *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070848>.
- 11 Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara/AMAN) quoted in Mufdil Tuhri, “Religion and Land Rights in Indonesian Indigenous-State Relations: Case Study of Orang Rimba in Jambi,” *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 10, no. 2 (2020): 229–248, 234; Maarif defines *adat* as, “religions of groups or communities “officially” defined by the government and civil society alliance to have at least three criteria: a genealogical kinship-based community, residing in an inherited territory, and living with an *adat* law system [...]” Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 1. This understanding of *adat* as “religion” is based on his conceptualization of “religion as a way of relating” which expands the limited world religion paradigm which according to him “sees religion as a practice which requires the hierarchical relation between God, humans, and nature.” Mufdil Tuhri, Samsul Maarif, and Rikardo Simarmata, “Adat, Islam, and the Idea of Religion in Colonial Indonesia,” *Al Albab* 9, no. 2 (2020): 159–178, 161.

as the attempts to define “religion” is always accompanied by a portrayal of what is not, the terminological shift above indicates the struggles that *agama leluhur* communities have gone through in securing the protection of their rights from the state. This is clear when we see the binary between *agama leluhur* and *agama resmi* (lit. formal/acknowledged religions) and the historical hermeneutics that characterized the conceptualization of “religion” (*agama*) in Indonesia that will be explained in Section Two of this paper. For the purpose of this introduction, it is sufficient for us to know that there are currently six state-acknowledged religions in Indonesia. They are: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Konghucu (a “religionized” version of Confucianism).¹²

The distinction between *agama leluhur* and *agama resmi* in Indonesia is not simply symbolic. The state acknowledgment of six formal religions in Indonesia comes with a stratified protection for the rights of their believers to practice their traditions, and, since monotheism is written as a primary foundation of the country, one’s identification with any of the formal religions becomes key to accessing various public services.¹³ In fact, it is only since November 2017 that the followers of *agama leluhur* could identify themselves as such in their national identity and family cards that are crucial for obtaining jobs, education, health care, marriage record, proof of land ownership, and others.¹⁴ Before November 2017, many of the followers of *agama leluhur* chose to identify themselves with one of the six formal religions in their identity and family cards just so they could access public services.¹⁵ The followers of *agama leluhur* in Indonesia are not only deprived of their rights to freely practice their religions, but more than that, the discriminatory status on their religions prevents them from accessing their basic rights as Indonesian citizens.

It is within this context that the interreligious relations between Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Sapta Darma followers in Sukoreno Village occur. Samsul Maarif, one of the foremost scholars on *agama leluhur* in Indonesia frames this issue through the notion of politics of religion. In his monograph on the ever-changing landscape of “religion/non-religion” binary in

12 “Religions that are followed by the Indonesian citizens are Islam, Christianity [Protestantism], Catholicism, Hindu, Buddhism, and Konghucu (Confucius). This fact can be proven by the historical development of religions in Indonesia” (Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, “Presidential Decision of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1/PNPS 1965 on the Prevention of Religious Blasphemy and Misuse of Religion,” <https://putusan3.mahkamahagung.go.id/>).

13 The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Chapter XI, Article 29:1.

14 Tuhri, “Religion and Land Rights,” 244.

15 Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 2.

Indonesia, Maarif uses the term “politics of religion” as a way to see religion, belief, *adat*, and culture as political constructs that are utilized to justify the domination of religious groups over those who are deemed as non-religious.¹⁶ Politics of religion certainly characterizes interreligious relations in Sukoreno Village, in which hegemonic religious groups (particularly, but not limited to Muslims) make use of the religion/non-religion binary to deny the religious legitimacy of Sapta Darma, and to deprive its followers of their religious freedom. Yet the religion/non-religion binary is more than a political construction used to sustain the socio-political and religious hegemony of the dominant religious groups. As we will see in the context of Sukoreno Village, the religion/non-religion binary itself is constantly being negotiated by the state, the dominant religious groups, and the minority religious groups on an everyday basis, and it is here that religious co-production can shed light on the complexity of their relations.

As previously mentioned, Heyden and Nirenberg place a priority on relations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—while acknowledging that religious co-production can also be applied to different cases—primarily due to the three religions’ shared reservoir of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives whose meanings are constructed and re-constructed through historical hermeneutics that brings paradigmatic and material changes to the past, present, and future of the three religious traditions. Something shared is, of course, a prerequisite for any form of cooperation, including religious co-production. In the case of Sukoreno Village, what is shared between the dominant religious groups is not a reservoir of historical/theological narratives and prophetic claims, but rather a socio-political position in the hierarchical reality of interreligious life in Indonesia that grants them legitimacies as the state-acknowledged religions in Indonesia, and thus as the “religions.” The locus of the issue in Sukoreno Village is about socio-political belonging, which is rooted in the contemporary dynamics of political authority and legitimacy, and the ways that state and religious authorities negotiate their relationship with each other.

As with other case of religious co-production, mutual transformation—though far from equal—characterizes interreligious relations in Sukoreno Village.¹⁷ In this case, mutual transformation is centered on the shaping and re-shaping of the meanings of “religion” within the local and national narratives of national monotheism in Indonesia. This is where the concept of religionization proves useful in elucidating specific features of the religio-

16 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 9.

17 Regarding “mutual transformation,” see Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 10.

political co-production that occurs in Sukoreno.¹⁸ Three aspects are particularly important in this matter. First, the role and place of the state in the formation of religions' perspectives of themselves and their religious and secular others. Second, a different kind of co-production in which the border between religious self and religious/secular others is located in the debates on socio-political legitimacy and belonging, and not in the discourses on orthodoxy and authenticity. Three, the agency of marginalized/secularized religious others in which they adopt the hegemonic narratives of religionization to negotiate a space of belonging within the national narrative of religion and progress.

The upcoming section of this paper outlines the long history of construction and reconstruction of the category of "religion" in Indonesia that specifically pertains to the existence of Sapta Darma as *aliran kepercayaan*. The First Section also narrates the history of Sapta Darma, and its presence in Sukoreno Village. The section will then be concluded by a description of social strategies that Sapta Darma followers do in the face of interreligious discrimination. Following the Second Section, the Third Section of the paper expounds on the dialectic of structure and agency in the process of religionization as an expression of religious co-production in Sukoreno Village. This section introduces institutional, paradigmatic, and interreligious meanings of religious co-production in Sukoreno through narratives of religionization. Lastly, the conclusion will highlight important points of the paper.

Sapta Darma: Existence, Contestation, and Social Psychology of a Minority Religion

A. Religion or Belief Stream? The Existence of Sapta Darma in Indonesia

Sapta Darma was born from a spiritual experience of an East Javanese man, Mr. Hardjosopoero on December 26th, 1952.¹⁹ As the story goes, Mr.

18 Marianne Moyaert, *Christian Imaginations of the Religious Other: A History of Religionization* (Wiley Blackwell, 2024); Michel Picard and Rémy Madinier, eds., *The Politics of Religion in Indonesia: Syncretism, Orthodoxy, and Religious Contention in Java and Bali* (Routledge, 2011); Markus Dreßler, "Modes of Religionization: A Constructivist Approach to Secularity," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities—Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 7 (2019).

19 The followers of Sapta Darma in Sukoreno Village stated that Mr. Hardjosopoero did not identify himself as a follower of any religion before he accepted the Sapta Darma revelation in 1952. They also stated that though not identifying

Hardjosopoero—who was a local barber—was plagued by an overwhelming anxiety on that day that he decided to skip work and rest in his house. At 1:00 AM that night, Mr. Hardjosopoero’s felt his body move against his will and he found himself sitting cross-legged facing East with his arms crossed. He tried to free himself from the influence of the invisible power, but he could not help but to scream three phrases repeatedly instead: “Allah Hyang Maha Agung,” (God the Almighty) “Allah Hyang Maha Rokhim,” (God the Most Compassionate) and “Allah Hyang Maha Adil” (God the Most Just).²⁰

The spiritual experience continued and Mr. Hardjosopoero’s shaking body involuntarily prostrated while he chanted “Hyang Maha Sujud Hyang Kuwasa,” (I prostrated to The Almighty) “Hyang Maha Suci Sujud Hyang Maha Kuwasa,” (My sacred soul prostrated to The Almighty) “Hyang Maha Suci Hyang Maha Kuwasa” (My sacred soul, [and] The Almighty). He then sat, and prostrated again while chanting, “Kesalahane Hyang Maha Suci Nyuwun Ngapuro,” (My sacred soul asks for forgiveness [from God] for all of my mistakes) three times, and then in the last prostration he chanted, “Hyang Maha Suci mertobat Hyang Maha Kuwasa” (My sacred soul repents to The Almighty) also for three times. The movements involved in this spiritual experience then served as a foundation for the primary ritual that Sapta Darma believers practice and known as “sujud” (prostration).²¹

To verify his claim of a spiritual experience, Mr. Hardjosopoero visited several of his closest friends who then witnessed and themselves experienced the same spiritual enlightenment. Mr. Hardjosopoero continuously gathered more witnesses to experience this spiritual enlightenment until on February 13th, 1953 he heard an invisible voice that legitimized his claim to be a messenger of God.²²

Sapta Darma (lit. The Seven Teachings) stands on seven principles that have to be followed by all of its believers. They are: 1, Devotion to God the Almighty, The Most Compassionate, The Most Just, The Wisest, and the Eternal; 2, Obeying the state’s Constitution with honesty and pure heart; 3,

himself as a follower of any religion, Mr. Hardjosopoero believed in the existence of God and His omnipotent power. There is no explanation provided on the issue in the official historical account of the birth of Sapta Darma and the biographical account of Mr. Hardjosopoero (*Sejarah Penerimaan Wahyu Wewarah Sapta Darma dan Perjalanan Panuntun Agung Sri Gutama*) as well.

20 Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, *Sejarah Penerimaan Wahyu Wewarah Sapta Darma dan Perjalanan Panuntun Agung Sri Gutama* (Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, 2010), 12.

21 Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 12.

22 Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 14.

Actively participate in the building and development of the nation; 4, Unconditionally helping everyone in needs with love and compassion; 5, Living courageously by believing in our own strength; 6, Striving for moral social and familial lives, being gentle and compassionate, and provide guidance in the service of others; and 7, There is no permanence in this world, everything is transient.²³

It is important to note that the birth of Sapta Darma in 1953 took place in a context where the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (heretofore, MORA) had decided to tighten its leash to control the growth of “quasi-religious sects” that were considered unprecedented.²⁴ MORA, which was established in 1946 to appease the loss of “santri” political faction over the erasure of Piagam Jakarta from the Indonesian Constitution, was specifically tasked to “make contact with [or to monitor] movements or religious groups and local religious sects which are not the part of Islam and Christianity” which they did by establishing a task force known at that time as Pengawas Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat (PAKEM/Supervisory Body of Local Beliefs in Society).²⁵

However, the state surveillance pushed the quasi-religious sects to establish an organization that can represent their interest vis-à-vis the state. In 1955, two years after Sapta Darma was born, Badan Kongres Kebatinan Indonesia (BKKI/Indonesian Kebatinan Congress Body) was established and chaired by a prominent politician who was involved in the preparation of the declaration of Indonesian independence, Mr. Wongsonegoro.²⁶ The result of the national election in 1955 that was won by the nationalist parties comprised of Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI/Indonesian Communist Party) and Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI/Indonesian Nationalist Party) over the Islamic parties NU/Nahdlatul Ulama, and Masyumi/Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia also strengthened the political opportunity for groups like Sapta Darma to strive for acceptance in Indonesia. The attendance of two thousand delegates who represented around two million believers of

23 Sri Pawenang, *Dasa Warsa Kerokhanian Sapta Darma: 10 Tahun Usia KSD* (Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Unit Penerbitan, 1978), 6.

24 “It has been reported that the number of these groups rose to approximately 360 in Java in 1953, whereas there had been only 29 groups in 1952” (Ismatu Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2017], 109).

25 A document drafted by the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence (Badan Penyelidik Usaha-usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia/BPUPKI) that served as a foundation for the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution that was known for including a controversial point in which Muslims must adhere to the Islamic Law. For more see Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 21–2. For the quotation see Ropi, *Religion and Regulation*, 109.

26 Ropi, *Religion and Regulation*, 109–110.

Kebatinan groups in their second congress in August 1956 showed the significant growth in numbers and political power of these groups.²⁷

Nonetheless, the success of Kebatinan groups to organize themselves nationally was not enough to grant them a legitimate presence in Indonesia. The state, through MORA, controls the definition of what considered a “religion” in a thick Abrahamic sense: a religion should have a prophet, a written scripture, international recognition, and be monotheistic.²⁸ To counter and conform to this definition, Kebatinan groups stated that they did not aim to form new religions, but rather to increase the quality of Indonesians’ understandings of religions.²⁹ Though later in 1960, during the Fourth Congress of BKKI, Kebatinan groups stated that the only difference between them and the state-acknowledged religions is on their foci, viz., while the state-acknowledged religions focus on the formality of worship and rituals, they place their focus on spiritual experiences and perfecting their humanity.³⁰

To this day, the struggles that are faced by religious groups such as Sapta Darma has been centered on acquiring the state’s acknowledgment of their existence as religions. As previously mentioned, this is an important issue for these religious groups because state acknowledgments do not only come with symbolic recognition, but also with social, political, and material implications for the believers. It is literally about survival. It is not surprising then that in 1978, Sri Pawenang—an assistant to Mr. Hardjosopoero who then replaced

27 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 29.

28 Krisharyanto Uumbu Deta, “Deconstructing the Dichotomy of Agama and Kepercayaan: A Transformative Strategy in the Politics of Recognition towards Marapu Indigenous Religion,” *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 12, no. 1 (2022): 102–125, 103. An analysis from Jane Monnig Atkinson on the divide between *agama* and *kepercayaan* is especially important to highlight. Atkinson writes: “The reason for the omission of traditional pagan ways from the Indonesian roster of legitimate religions is clear. Implicit in the concept of agama are notions of progress, modernization, and adherence to nationalist goals. Populations regarded as ignorant, backward, or indifferent to the nationalist vision are people who de facto lack a religion. Agama is a dividing line that sets off the mass of peasants and urban dwellers, on the one side, from small traditional communities (weakly integrated into the national economic and political system), on the other. People who lack an officially recognized religion are referred to in Indonesian as orang yang belum beragama (“people who do not yet possess a religion”). The negative belum is significant here, for it implies that conversion to a recognized religion is inevitable.” Jane Monnig Atkinson, “Religions in Dialogue: The Construction of an Indonesian Minority Religion,” *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 4 (1983): 684–696, 688.

29 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 29.

30 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 31.

him to be the leader of Sapta Darma after his passing—claimed that Sapta Darma is a religious group, and demanded the government to acknowledge its equality with other state-acknowledged religions.³¹

As recently as 2017 with the Constitutional Court Decision that authorizes the believers of *aliran kepercayaan* and *agama adat* to list their respective religions on their national ID and family cards, and with the statement from the Ministry of Home Affairs stating that, despite the decision by the Constitutional Court, *aliran kepercayaan* is different from but equal to *agama*,³² the discourses over the classification and differentiation of what is and is not “religion” still occupy a primary space in Indonesia. We agree with Samsul Maarif that the importance of defining what is “religion” in Indonesia is due to the formation of “politik agama” (politics of religion), which in turn is a product of high-level negotiation in the founding of the country, and a legacy of colonial politics of religious differentiation. In the colonial context, Maarif refers to the Dutch colonial policy by the end of 19th century to institutionalize *adat* (Indonesian local customary laws, traditions, and ways of life), and depoliticize Islam as the root of institutionalization of *agama* in Indonesia.³³ The institutionalization of *adat* and the support that they got from the colonial government not only diminished the wider meaning of *adat* from way of life to legalistic structure, but also bred animosity between the Islamic groups and those who are associated with *adat* (indigenous groups, *aliran kebatinan* followers, Muslims who practice *adat*, etc.).³⁴ Furthermore, even when *adat* was supported and institutionalized, the colonial government also saw it as backward supernatural thoughts and practices that must be civilized through the introduction of Christian education.³⁵ It was from this colonial distinction between *adat* and religion then that, first, *adat* lost its religious connotation and become no more than structure of customary laws, and second, a foundation for an epistemological distinction between “religions” and “non-religions” was erected in Indonesia. The association between *adat* with backwardness and superstitions also contributes to the marginalization of religious groups such as Sapta Darma, and to the connotation of state-acknowledged religions with national progress and modernity.³⁶

31 Pawenang, *Dasa-Warsa*, 6.

32 Umbu Deta, “Deconstructing the Dichotomy,” 103.

33 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 12.

34 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 14, 13.

35 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 13.

36 Atkinson, “Religions in Dialogue,” 688.

The divide between *adat* and religion then overshadowed the divergence between categories of “santri” and “abangan” in the early 20th century. “Santri” (lit. students of Islamic schools in Indonesia) and “Abangan” (lit. the red group)—along with another category of “Priyayi” (lit. royalty class)—are socio-religious categories of Javanese society proposed by Clifford Geertz in his 1960 book *The Religion of Java*. Geertz defined Santri, Abangan, and Priyayi in this way:

Abangan, representing a stress on the animistic aspects of the over-all Javanese syncretism and broadly related to the peasant element in the population; santri, representing a stress on the Islamic aspects of the syncretism and generally related to the trading element (and to certain elements in the peasantry as well); and priyaji [old spelling of “priyayi”], stressing the Hinduist aspects and related to the bureaucratic element—these, then, are the three main subtraditions I shall describe.³⁷

Geertz’s classification has been subjected to critiques that show the complexity of Javanese society beyond *santri-abangan-priyayi* categories.³⁸ However, at a national level, and within Indonesia’s national history the categories of *santri* and *abangan*, it has still proven useful to understand the development of politics of religion in Indonesia.³⁹ As Maarif argues, the root of politics of religion in Indonesia was planted deep in the founding moment of the nation in which *santri* political factions demanded the formation of Indonesia as an Islamic state, while the *abangan* and non-Islamic political factions opposed that demand and aimed to shape Indonesia as a secular state.⁴⁰ A compromise was achieved on June 22, 1945 in which the Jakarta Charter (Piagam Jakarta) was formulated as the foundation of the establishment of the country. But then another debate ensued in which Christian and *abangan* political factions expressed their disapproval of seven words that were written as parts of the Jakarta Charter: “[...] with an

37 Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 6.

38 Robert B. Cruikshank, “Abangan, Santri, and Priyaji: A Critique,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1972): 39–43; Muhamad Ali, “Categorizing Muslims in Postcolonial Indonesia,” *Moussons: Social Science Research on Southeast Asia* 11, (2007): 33–62; Amanah Nurish, “Santri and Abangan after A Half Century of Clifford Geertz,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 21, no. 2 (2021): 226–239.

39 Syafiq Hasyim, “Abangan, Santri, and Priyayi: Three Streams in Indonesia’s Electoral Politics,” Commentary: RSIS Publications, 16 April 2019, <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/indonesian-presidential-election-2019-abangan-santri-and-priyayi-three-streams-in-indonesias-electoral-politics/>.

40 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 17.

obligation to practice the Islamic syariah for Muslims.”⁴¹ Eventually, Jakarta Charter was rejected as part of the Indonesian Constitution, though the Islamic factions successfully planted epistemological distinctions between “agama” and “kepercayaan” in Article 29 of the Constitution of The Republic of Indonesia.⁴²

With the legalization of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as the six state-acknowledged religions, the debate over what is “agama” and “kepercayaan” becomes more limited since the state has a hegemonic understanding of what is “religion.” The contemporary discursive landscape of “agama” and “kepercayaan” is characterized by the *kepercayaan* groups’ advocacy for equal rights and protection from the state, and the rise of “agama leluhur” (ancestral religions) as a post-Reformasi category for religious groups such as Sapta Darma.⁴³ Indeed, as Julia Howell writes, Indonesia approaches its religious diversity through the lens of “delimited pluralism” in which it circumscribes “what officially counts as religion by imposing on its citizens an obligation to acknowledge one of a limited number of “world religions,” only one of which is Islam.”⁴⁴ It is within this delimited pluralism that Sapta Darma still struggles to find its legitimate place as a religious group in Indonesia.

B. “A Means to Reach God”: The Theology of Sapta Darma

Let me use a travelling metaphor: We both want to go to Jakarta, but you go there by car while I go there by riding my motorcycle. Our destination is the same, Jakarta, but our vehicles are different. This is how I understand the religious differences between us, though my tradition is not formally acknowledged as a “religion.” Your religion, and my religion both are means to reach God (Andi, Sapta Darma follower).⁴⁵

In his article on the difference between World Religions Paradigm (WRP) and Indigenous Religions Paradigm (IRP), Samsul Maarif notes that the IRP is characterized by an interpersonal cosmology in which, “Both human and non-human persons are recognized through their intentionality and

41 “[...] dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya.”

42 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 21.

43 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 9.

44 Julia D. Howell, “Muslims, the New Age and Marginal Religions in Indonesia: Changing Meanings of Religious Pluralism,” *Social Compass* 52, no. 4 (2005): 473–493, 474.

45 Interview with Andi, October 14th 2023, Jember.

purposive actions that constitute (interpersonal) relationships.”⁴⁶ In this paradigm, “To be a person is to engage in relationship(s),” and thus to be religious is to engage in harmonious relationships, with the consequence that disharmonious relationships are deemed as irreligious.⁴⁷ In Sapta Darma, five of seven main pillars of their teachings are concerned with the ways their followers ought to build relationships with others, with themselves, and their roles in Indonesian social contexts. The second pillar of *Wewarah Pitu* (lit. The Seven Advice) in Sapta Darma is, “obeying the state’s Constitution with honesty and pure heart.”⁴⁸ This pillar connects faith in Sapta Darma with one’s obligation to obey the Constitution of the state, and it is complemented with the third pillar in *Wewarah Pitu*, “actively participate in the building and development of the nation,” which depicts a faithful Sapta Darma believer as an active member of the Indonesian nation.⁴⁹ In essence, these pillars teach that an ideal Sapta Darma believer is the one who obeys the constitution and actively contributes to the nation-building process.

Scaling down from a Sapta Darma’s vision for their believers in the life of the nation, the fourth and sixth pillars of *Wewarah Pitu* delineate believers’ places in their communities, families, and interpersonal relationships. The fourth pillar teaches, “unconditionally helping everyone in need with love and compassion,”⁵⁰ while the sixth pillar declares, “striving for moral social and familial lives, being gentle and compassionate, and provide guidance in the service of others.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, the emphasis on interpersonal relationships and devotion to the community in these two pillars is tampered with a focus on individual independence and strength in the fifth pillar of *Wewarah Pitu* which states, “living courageously by believing in our own strength.”⁵²

True to the interpersonal cosmology that Maarif identifies as a characteristic of IRP, the core teaching of Sapta Darma comprises of the

46 Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 3.

47 Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 3.

48 “Kanthi djudjur lan sutjining ati kudu setja anindakake angger-angger ing Negarane” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).

49 “Melu tjawe-tjawe atjantjut tali wanda andjaga adeging Nusa lan Bangsaane,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).

50 “Tetulung marang sapa bae jen perlu, kanthi ora nduweni pamrih apa bae kadjaba mung rasa welas lan asih,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).

51 “Tanduke marang warga bebrajan kudu Susila kanthi alusing budi pakarti tansah agawe pepadang lan mareming lijan,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 19).

52 “Wani urip kanthi kapitajan saka kekuwatane dewe,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).



Figure 1. The symbol of human personhood (Image source: Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 171).

combination of applied social ethics, and physical and spiritual trainings with the goal of the formation of a “perfect human being” (Javanese, *Satria utama*).⁵³ Their motto (Javanese, *Sesanti*) that, as the case with *Wewarah Pitu* and other core teachings of Sapta Darma, came as a divine revelation to their Founder, Sri Gutama, is “wherever and to whomever, Sapta Darma community must be shining like the sun.”⁵⁴ At the individual level, the teachings of Sapta Darma aim to shape their believers to know themselves physically, spiritually and theologically, and for them to reach physical and spiritual tranquility. The teachings also focus on shaping physical and spiritual awareness to pursue moral values as taught and embodied by Sri Gutama, the honorific title bestowed by God on Mr. Hardjosopoero, the founder of Sapta Darma. In his teachings, Sri Gutama stated that the purpose of our life is to calibrate ourselves with the Divine Will, and thus, to reach the highest spiritual awareness known as *Suci Sejati* (lit. the true sanctity).⁵⁵ This can be done through the combination of faith, mystical path, and the practice of Semedi (Javanese meditation).

The intertwining of Sapta Darma’s visions of creation narrative, concepts of personhood, and social, moral, and spiritual teachings can be gleaned from their meaningful symbol that is known as “the symbol of human personhood.” This symbol can be found in the houses of the faithful, and in their designated houses of worship known as “Sanggar” (Figure 1).

The four corners of the green square in the symbol reflects Sapta Darma’s creation narrative in which humans are created from the

53 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 180.

54 “Ing ngendi bae marang sapa bae warga Sapta Darma kudu sumunar pindha baskara,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 179).

55 Pawenang, Dasa-Warsa, 6.

coalescence between Divine Light (Javanese, *Sinar Cahaya Allah*), the essences of earth (Javanese, *Sari-sari bumi*), and the partnership of man and woman. The human body that contains Divine Light then represented by the dark green edges of the square, and the light green backdrop in the square respectively. Furthermore, the creation narrative is also shown through the white triangle with golden edges in the symbol, whose three corners constitute the concept of *Tri Tunggal* (lit. three in one) that are Divine Light (*Nur Cahya*), sperm or essence from man (*Nur Rasa*, the light of senses), and egg cell or essence from woman (*Nur Buat*, the light of creation). The golden edges of the triangle symbolize the Divine Light that envelops all creation, and the white backdrop in the triangle stands for the sacredness of essences that create human beings. The sacredness of human creation then obliges all human beings to embody honesty and justice while being aware that the mission of their lives is to return to the holiness of their Creator. Ultimately, the cycle of life and death that reflects the transient quality of physical beings is represented by the circles in the middle of the symbol.

In turn, Sapta Darma's concept of personhood is indicated through the black, red, yellow, and white circles at the center of the symbol. These colors represent the four different ardent impulses that compete to define a person: black depicts wrath that is located in the mouth, red portrays rage that is located in the ears, yellow illustrates desire that is located in the eyes, and white reflects virtuous impulse that is located in the nose. Thus, since each impulse corresponds to specific physical sense, Sapta Darma's believers ought to physically train their senses to control malicious impulses, and develop benevolent one: that is, the physical and spiritual dimension of a believer is intertwined with each other and should be shaped in conjunction with one another. The Javanese mythological character Semar that is placed in the middle of the circle serves as a model of "perfect human" for those who could control their malicious impulses, develop righteous morality, and thus achieve a personal connection with God.⁵⁶

56 Semar (also known as Ismaya) is a mythological character in Javanese stories that is widely believed to be a representation of the voice of the people against a hegemonic power. In Javanese puppet stories, Semar is known as one of the descendants of Sang Hyang Wenang (the creator of the universe) who, after losing a competition against his sibling Manikmaya (also known as Batara Guru who replaced Sang Hyang Wenang as the lord of the universe), was sent to earth to take care of humanity and the descendants of Manikmaya. Semar was also charged to report any injustices that Manikmaya might have done in their tenure as the lord of the universe to Sang Hyang Wenang. For more, read: Catur Nugroho, "Asal-Usul Mitos Tokoh Semar: Eksistensi dan Esensinya bagi Masyarakat Jawa," *Lakon: Jurnal Pengkajian dan Penciptaan Wayang* 20, no. 1 (2023): 1–9.

Lastly, the symbol also shows three words and one phrase written in Javanese characters. The word on the left side of the triangle means impulses (Javanese, *nafsu*); the word on the right side of the triangle means ethics (Javanese, *budi*); the upper word on the bottom side of the triangle refers to morality (Javanese, *pakarti*); and the words on top of the triangle, and the bottom word below the triangle both form the phrase *Sapta Darma* that means the seven sacred obligations. The three words (impulses, ethics, and morality) contain the core of *Sapta Darma* teachings that aim to create a personal connection with God through the combination of physical and spiritual trainings, and the practice of righteous living.⁵⁷

The primary ritual in *Sapta Darma* is “sujud” (lit. prostration). Sujud can be traced back to an event on December 27th, 1952, in which Mr. Hardjosopoero received his first revelation that caused his body to move beyond his control in a chain of prostrating movement.⁵⁸ This chain of prostrations was then institutionalized as the primary ritual of *Sapta Darma*. There are two kinds of prostration in *Sapta Darma*. They are daily prostration, and explorative prostration. Believers are commanded to do daily prostration—individually or with the community—at specific hours during which they can fully concentrate, usually in the early morning or late at night. Meanwhile, explorative prostration is conducted as specific events in *Sanggar* in which believers cultivate knowledge of their spiritual selves as individual, and as a community.

With the goals of achieving physical and spiritual knowledge of oneself, and communion with God, the most important thing to attain during prostration rituals—and anytime and anywhere as needed by the believers—is a state of mind and soul called “*ening*” (lit. quiet, silent, tranquil). When one is in the state of *ening*, one would be able to feel gentle vibration within oneself (physical and spiritual) that indicates one’s unification with God (Javanese, *manunggal*). The Handbook of *Sapta Darma* explains *ening* in this way:

Ening is not about closing your eyes, or something like that. *Ening* is the quiet of the mind.... For example, we forgot where something is, let us say, our matches. We looked for it everywhere, but we could not find it. And then we stopped searching, quieted our minds, then suddenly we remembered where we placed our matches. How do things like that happen? When we quiet our minds, we emit a light that then kindle our knowledge about the location of the matches.

57 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 171–174.

58 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 12.

Let us refine our coarse ethics and morality, so that it is easy for us to own the essence of life within ourselves [...].⁵⁹

Another example:

[We know that] one who is asleep lost their consciousness. The truth is that the one who is ‘asleep’ is their mind. For example, they dreamed of being in Jakarta. Who is actually going to Jakarta? This is your light and essence of life. Let us learn how to make our minds ‘asleep’, that is achieving ening while we are fully conscious: asleep in our consciousness.... Ening is not thinking about anything, so that you can focus on the essence of your life.⁶⁰

Ening is a meditative state in which a believer reaches unification with the Divine by resting their mind, sharpening their intuitions, and activating the sacred vibrations in their body. Two of our informants, Andi and his father, told us that it is not easy to attain the state of *ening*, and thus Sapta Darma believers in Sukoreno utilize a traditional percussion instrument called “tabuan” to assist them in their communal prostrations to achieve the state of *ening*. Tabuan makes the sound of “nang, ning, nung, gung,” which symbolizes the vertical spiritual steps that the believers must experience to reach *manunggal* (lit. unification/communion with God) which is the core of the state of *ening*.⁶¹

To understand the interweaving concepts between physicality and spirituality in the teachings of Sapta Darma, it is important to engage with the concept of *rasa* that is also a primary idea in Javanese cosmology. In Sapta Darma, since *cahaya* (light) and *rasa* (intuition, senses, feelings) were actually integrated to create *wadag* (vessel, body) then the ideal constitution of human beings is represented by the domination of *rasa* over *pikir* (thoughts). Yet, what commonly occurs is that human places primacy to *wadag* over *rasa* and *cahaya*, and therefore allow *pikir* to dominate *rasa*. Sapta Darma, then, is a set of teachings and moral and ethical principles that train humans to reverse the domination of *pikir* over *rasa* through physical and spiritual practices.⁶²

59 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 123.

60 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 123.

61 “Nang, ketenangan (lit. tranquility), ning, bening (lit. clarity), nung, demunung (peak of consciousness), gung, manunggal (lit. unification/communion with God),” (Interview with Andi and his father, May 23rd, 2024).

62 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 126.

Writing about the concept of *rasa* in Javanese cosmology, Paul Stange writes:

The special potency of the concept of *rasa* stems in part from the spectrum of meanings attached to it. Because *rasa* links the physical sense of taste and touch to emotions, the refined feeling of the heart, and the deepest mystical apprehension of the ultimate, it provides a continuum which links surface meanings to which anyone can relate to inner levels of experience which normally [...] appear discontinuous.⁶³

Accordingly, even when the relationship between *rasa*, *cahaya*, *pikir*, and *wadag* are hierarchical in the teachings of Sapta Darma, they still form a continuous connection in which the spiritual is—partly—located in, constituted by, and activated through the physical, and likewise, the intuitive power of the physical/spiritual is formed through the control of *wadag* and *pikir* by *rasa* and *cahaya*. Therefore, Sapta Darma's teaching on *ening*, with quotidian examples of looking for one's misplaced matches is not actually farfetched because the mastery of *rasa* would allow one to both access ultimate knowledge (Javanese, *Kewaskitaan*) gained from unification/communion with God, and to find one's lost matches if needed. In other words, knowledge is in physical and spiritual domain and, thus, embodied and abstract, felt and thought.

A major part of Sapta Darma's teachings in which the amalgamation between the physical and spiritual manifests clearly is the concept of *Sabda Usada* (lit. healing words). *Sabda Usada* is a social-spiritual practice in Sapta Darma in which their believers heal the sick through the treatment of the patient's *tali rasa* (rope of inner/intuitive feelings that are located in twenty different locations in the body), and the efficacy of the believers' words through an utterance of the word *waras* (lit. healed, healthy).⁶⁴ Not only that *Sabda Usada* uses a spiritual power to make an impact in the physical world by healing the sick, but it also becomes one of the most common ways of people from other religions to convert into Sapta Darma; it brings demographic ramification into this nascent religious tradition.

Mrs. Siti, a middle-aged woman in Sukoreno, converted into Sapta Darma from Islam after her now deceased husband was healed through the treatment of a *Sabda Usada*. After years of medical treatments proven to be in vain, Mrs. Siti brought her husband to meet with a Sapta Darma believer

63 Paul Stange, "The Logic of Rasa in Java," *Indonesia* 38 (1984): 113–134, 127.

64 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 38, 143, 153.

who guided them to do *sujud*. After several encounters, her husband felt much better and eventually healed. Convinced by the spiritual power within the Sapta Darma tradition, her husband then converted and she followed suit. Mrs. Siti stated that she actually could not care less about converting into a new religion in her age. Yet, the healing that her husband gained from Sapta Darma treatment filled her with gratitude and inspired her to convert into the tradition. At a later time, Mrs. Siti also suffered from an illness that was also healed through *Sabda Usada*.⁶⁵

The affective-instrumental factor that influenced many to convert into Sapta Darma made it into a pluralistic tradition that is comprised of people who come from different religious backgrounds. Sapta Darma elders in Sukoreno informed us that many believers still have ties to their previous religions, even after they converted into Sapta Darma, which in turn influenced Sapta Darma's teachings on interreligious relations. Yet, more important than that, the fluidity of Sapta Darma's definition of "religion," and its teachings of social ethics engendered a conception of porous religious border in Sapta Darma's perspective on themselves, and their religious others.

Instead of defining *agama* (religion) in a way that outlines rigid religious differences between them and their religious others, Sapta Darma's understanding of *agama* shows the foundation of their epistemology that is rooted in their creation narrative and the relationship between human and the divine: "Sapta Darma is an agama [religion]. [Do you know] why? You must know that the definition of agama according to Sapta Darma's spiritual teachings is, a = asal mula manusia [the origin of human], ga = gama/kama, that is the sacred/white water, and ma = maya, that is the light from the Divine [the human soul]."⁶⁶

It can be argued that Sapta Darma does not concern themselves with drawing up borders between them and the other religions. The concept of *agama* that commonly stands for "religion" in Indonesia operates as a descriptor for the relationship between human and the divine in Sapta Darma which is partly in line with Maarif's conceptualization of "religion as a way of relating." Though a deeper analysis on Sapta Darma's fluid interreligious boundaries is beyond the scope of this paper, based on our fieldwork in Sukoreno we contend that Sapta Darma's emphasis on embodied experiences—especially through healing rituals—instead of theological discourses in the ways their followers convert into the religion

65 Interview with Mrs. Siti, October 15, 2023.

66 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 138.

create a lower concern about establishing a rigid religious border. In addition, the pressure that comes from their marginal socio-political position demands the followers of Sapta Darma to be flexible enough in practicing their religion to the extent that often times they need to find their own religious meanings and values while practicing other religions' rituals. An experience from a follower of Sapta Darma, Andi, who needed to hide his identity as a Sapta Darma follower and practiced Muslim prayers throughout his school years is an example of the theological flexibility that Sapta Darma followers develop amidst the marginalization of their religion in Sukoreno.

The debacle over whether Sapta Darma is an “agama”—in its formal sense—significantly shaped the ways Muslim leaders in Sukoreno engage with its believers, and the ways in which they perceived Islam. Our interviews with two Muslim leaders in Sukoreno show that they take Sapta Darma's conception of porous interreligious boundary, and the absence of rigid doctrines within the tradition as proofs that Sapta Darma is not an *agama* and thus does not deserve an acknowledgment from the state with all the rights and protection that come with it.

One primary lens from which Muslim leaders in Sukoreno judge Sapta Darma's lack of qualifications to be an “agama” is funerary rites. For these leaders, the absence of prescribed funeral methods and rituals in Sapta Darma as practiced in Sukoreno indicates the absence of specific laws in the tradition that, in turn, defines a religion. Ustadz Muhammad, a Sukoreno Muslim leader stated: “My neighbor was a Sapta Darma believer, but when they died, the funeral followed Hindu rites because Sapta Darma does not have specific regulations concerning funerary rites. This is why Sapta Darma is an “aliran” (sect) and not an “agama” (religion) because if it is, then it should have a “syariat” on how to do a funeral.”⁶⁷

In the same vein, Mrs. Sutini, a convener of a local female Islamic activity group and a community leader, said:

I often think [about the fact] that Sukoreno is known nation-wide as a Pancasila village whose people live in harmony. I think all is good and well for me. I like harmony. But do you know that [interreligious] harmony in Sukoreno is possible because the people here are lacking in their religious knowledge. That is why they accept [any] religions; [when someone] invited them into Christianity, [they would say] yes, [when someone] invited them into

67 Interview with Ustadz Muhammad, April 20, 2024.

Hinduism, [they would say] yes, [when someone] invited them into Sapta Darma, [they would say] yes. For those who invited these people into new religions, please be accountable about it; guide them [in that new religion], do not leave them alone, so that they can practice the new religion well. The Hindus I think are still strong [in giving religious guidance to their followers]. The weakest one is Sapta Darma. I am wondering, what [religion] do they want to follow? Yesterday, there was a Sapta Darma follower who passed away, I was astonished [because] there were no Sapta Darma leaders who could help the family caring for the dead. Instead, a Muslim ustadz took care of the dead, [he] bathed [the body], wrapped [the body in shroud] and read tahlil for the dead.⁶⁸

In addition to the problem of Ustadz Muhammad's narrow definition of "agama" that is only boiled down to the presence of an equally narrow understanding of "syariat" (religious positive law), we also see an interreligious anxiety in Mrs. Sutini's response in which the ambiguity posed by the flexibility of Sapta Darma's interreligious border was perceived as a weakness of faith that threatens the integrity of other religions whose coherence were proven by the existence of traditional religious authority. For Mrs. Sutini, rather than an indication of communal harmony, the interreligious amity in Sukoreno is a sign of weakness, if not degradation of faith in which followers of religions other than Islam ultimately are not as steadfast in committing to their faiths as the Muslims do. This perspective is also applied to Muslims who converted into Sapta Darma and/or Muslims who live in a multi-religious family in Sukoreno. Thus, it can be said that for Mrs. Sutini real Muslims who have a strong understanding and knowledge of Islam will not be engaging in such heterodox practices.⁶⁹ It is this deeper layer of local perception on interreligious relations that we must observe in order to understand the complexity of interreligious contestation in Sukoreno Village.

C. Religious Groups' Self-Perceptions, Contestations and Resistance in Sukoreno Village: A Social Psychology Analysis

According to the data released by BPS-Statistics Indonesia in 2024, the religious demographic profile of Sukoreno Village is as follows: Islam, 8,742 people; Christianity (Protestants), 31 people; Christianity (Catholics), 127

68 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, November 1, 2023.

69 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, November 1, 2023.



Figure 2. The location of a Muslim *musalla* (left) and the Sapta Darma's *sanggar* (right) in Sukoreno. The distance between the two is only 100 meters away (Photo source: Field observation, Sukoreno, October 12, 2023).

people; Hinduism, 357 people; and Sapta Darma, 8 people. In addition, there are six mosques, twenty-two *musalla* (small mosques with the capacity of tens of worshippers), one Protestant church, one Catholic church, and two Hindu temples that serve as houses of worship in the village.⁷⁰ There is a gap between these formal numbers with the religious demographic data that our researchers gathered in the field which look as follows: Islam, 7,152 people; Hinduism, 124 people; Christianity (Catholics), 110 people; Sapta Darma, 70 people; Christianity (Protestants), 35 people; and Ilmu Sejati, 25 people.⁷¹ This gap is interesting because it clearly shows the profiles of religious minority groups that are either reduced in numbers and/or completely non-existent in the formal religious demographic data released by the state.

Furthermore, based on our field interviews with the elders of Sapta Darma, it is known that there are at least seventeen *sanggars* (Sapta Darma's houses of worship and community buildings) scattered throughout Jember Township with the largest of them all located in Sukoreno Village.⁷² What is more interesting is that the location of the largest Sapta Darma's *sanggar* in Sukoreno is just across a Muslim *musalla* in the village, with a distance between them less than 100 meters (Figure 2). Some would see this as a

70 Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Jember, Kecamatan Umbulsari dalam Angka (Umbulsari District in Figures), 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Jember, 2024), Katalog: 1102001.3509140.

71 This data is in line with the finding of other group of researchers that is presented in: Fitriatul Hasana, Ahmad Arif Widiyanto, and Joan Hesti Gita Purwasih, "Dinamika Konflik Identitas Penghayat Sapta Darma di Desa Sukoreno, Jember, Jawa Timur," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 16, no. 1 (2021): 1–26.

72 Interview with Sapta Darma elders in Sukoreno, November 30th, 2024.

picture of interreligious harmony. However, the same picture also shows interreligious contestation between different religious identities in the village. As can be seen from statements made by Ustadz Muhammad and Mrs. Sutini before, suspicions towards the growth and existence of Sapta Darma abound in the village. This sense of threat would usually be expressed in term of “sesat” (lit. strayed, lost) that is associated with the teachings of Sapta Darma.⁷³

In a social psychology perspective, anxiety is known as a response that comes out in a threatening situation. In this setting, anxiety can take many forms including cognitive fear, avoidance, physiological responses, and subjective experiences that produce tensions.⁷⁴ At a systemic level, the social anxiety that religious majority groups direct toward the minority ones can be seen as a result of national policies that alienate religious minority groups by not acknowledging them as “agama.” Without this acknowledgement, religious minority groups with indigenous beliefs like Sapta Darma are often seen as “primitive beliefs” and thus targeted to be subjects of conversion by state-acknowledged religious groups.⁷⁵

Though progress has been reached—with the Indonesian Constitutional Court’s ruling that allows religious minority/indigenous groups to list their religious identities on national ID and family cards—religious minority/indigenous groups still feel disquiet about their existence in Indonesia. Followers of Sapta Darma specifically hope that they would be treated on an equal basis with other religious believers, and that Sapta Darma can be acknowledged not only as “kebudayaan” (culture), but also as “agama” (religion).⁷⁶

Thus, it can be argued that interreligious discriminations towards religious minority/indigenous groups cannot be wholly explained by interreligious prejudices, but rather are the results of various factors, including national political dynamics, and the vast development of

73 Interview with a Muslim head figure of the local Religious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama) in Sukoreno, October 13, 2023.

74 Tri Dayakisni and Hudaniah, *Psikologi Sosial* (University of Muhammadiyah Malang Press, 2015), 130–131.

75 The then President of Indonesia, General Soeharto stated in his speech during the 1967 Interreligious Conference (Musyawarah Antar Agama) in Jakarta: “The government would like to make it clear that we will not stand in the way of any religious propagations. It is a noble task for a religion to convert those who do not have any religion in Indonesia into one of the faithful religions (state-acknowledged religions),” (cited in: Afif Muhammad, *Agama dan Konflik Sosial: Studi Pengalaman Indonesia* [Penerbit Marja, 2013], 83).

76 Interview with Sapta Darma followers, October 2024.



Figure 3. The celebration of Tanggap Warsa Satu Suro 1958 Saka Jawa by Sapta Darma followers in Sukoreno (Photo source: Awan, 2024).

technology and globalization. In this case, it is important to recall that the slow growth of Sapta Darma in Sukoreno mostly depends on those who converted into the tradition due to their search for physical and spiritual well-being amidst the hectic, modern life. On the other hand, globalization also provides a wider space for interreligious dialogue in which religious minority/indigenous groups are relatively free to express their cultural and religious identities. For example, on July 20, 2024, despite all the interreligious tensions in Sukoreno, Sapta Darma followers celebrated the auspicious day of Satu Suro in Javanese calendar as their religious holiday. The celebration was well attended by Sukoreno's religious leaders (Figure 3).

The social identity of a group is mostly composed of the membership of that group. The formation of a social identity depends on the individual characters of the member of the group, as well as through social association within the group. In turn, social identity and group membership fulfill the individual need to belong. The need to be accepted by a group motivates us to seek and sustain a positive social relationship with others. On the other hand, positive relationships with others are a basic component of one's psychological well-being.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Tajfel and Turner argue that we tend to build and strengthen our identities through association with our groups (ingroup), and differentiation from other groups (outgroup).⁷⁸ It is within this ingroup-outgroup dynamics that we tend to see our own social associations in positive lights (ingroup favoritism) while discriminating against those who are outside of our associations (outgroup discrimination). This

77 Yanti B. Sugarda, *Multikulturalisme dan Toleransi: Sebuah catatan Konsepsional dari Perspektif Filsafat dan Psikologi* (Gramedia, 2022), 33–34.

78 Henri Tajfel and John Turner, *An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relation*, (Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

dynamic can be seen in Sukoreno's Muslim leaders' perceptions on Sapta Darma and its believers whom they thought of as "lacking in religious knowledge," as well as in the perspectives of some Sapta Darma believers who see some Muslims in Sukoreno as "fanatics" (as opposed to Sapta Darma believers who see themselves as "nationalists").

The Muslim *musalla* that is located face-to-face with the Sapta Darma's *sanggar* in Sukoreno symbolizes a contestation between religious majority and minority groups. During our observations, we noticed that the *musalla* placed their loudspeaker at a low point right under their door. The Muslim community in Sukoreno identifies this as a sign of an interreligious conviviality. However, the loud voice that comes out of the low-hanging speaker outside of the *musalla* presents a distraction for Sapta Darma followers whose *sanggar* is located right in front of the *musalla*.⁷⁹ In that situation, Sapta Darma followers were forced to conduct their worship amidst the disruptive loud voice that comes out of the *musalla*. The followers that we interviewed told us that they chose to stay quiet and adapt to the loud voice from the *musalla* to sustain "social harmony." Andi, a follower of Sapta Darma further explained the concept of "harmony" as the alignment of spiritual (inner) and social (outer) dimension of their lives which is nurtured through the ritual of 'sujud' (prostration). In the case of interreligious discrimination that they suffered in Sukoreno, Andi interpreted those challenges as a form of trial from God to strengthen their belief. Being aware of their marginal status in Sukoreno, the followers of Sapta Darma decided to see the unfair treatments that they received as a crucible for achieving balance between their spiritual and social lives.⁸⁰

In the field of social psychology, rationalization is known as a self- and group-defense mechanism in which individuals and groups construct "fake explanations" for counter-intuitive actions that they take.⁸¹ Through "rationalization," one presents a seemingly logical reasoning to explain their behaviors even though such reasoning does not reflect what really happened. Sapta Darma followers in Sukoreno see their discomforts that come from interreligious discrimination as a part of their social life. A follower of the tradition that we spoke to said that they felt disturbed by the loudspeaker yet also took the disturbance as a part of their daily life.⁸² The followers of Sapta

79 Field observation, Sanggar Candi Busana Sapta Darma, October 14, 2023.

80 Interview with Andi, June 16, 2026.

81 Siegfried Zepf, "About Rationalization and Intellectualization," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 20, no. 3 (2011): 148–158.

82 Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sanggar Candi Busana Sapta Darma, October 14, 2023.

Darma opted to avoid social conflict by staying quiet and not complaining. They prefer to focus on the substance of their worship than invoking social unrest by complaining about the *musalla*'s loudspeaker.⁸³ Another follower of the tradition told us that as long as they can unify their focus with Allah Hyang Maha Kuasa in their *sujud* ritual, then the presence of any disturbance does not matter much.⁸⁴ Some followers of the tradition further referring to the practice of *sujud* amidst the noise of the loudspeaker as *topo ngrame* (lit. meditation in noisy/crowded space) which serve as another layer of test of the faith for them.

Moreover, the followers of Sapta Darma also opted to keep their pain to themselves to sustain their social relations with others in Sukoreno. In this context, they apply what is known in the field of social psychology as “impression management” to shape their social images according to the expectations of their local community.⁸⁵ In this process, individual actions are curated to fulfill social expectations and/or to produce certain impressions. Argyle argues that there are three primary motives for impression management, they are: one, to accrue social rewards; two, to sustain and/or increase self-esteem; and three, to support the formation of personal identity.⁸⁶ An interesting point to note in this matter is that the followers of Sapta Darma are not the only one who practice impression management in Sukoreno. In the occasions of *selamatan* (neighborhood gatherings over prayer and food to celebrate/commemorate important life events) both the followers of Sapta Darma, and members of “formal” religious groups in Sukoreno would invite each other. *Selamatan* has always been an interreligious affair in the village though it involves different motivations from each group. For the followers of Sapta Darma, inviting members of other religious traditions into their *selamatan* is a way to sustain some kind of “social harmony” in which they can be free from direct conflict with their neighbors. While for the members of “formal” religious groups inviting the followers of Sapta Darma to their *selamatan* is a nod to the title of “Desa Pancasila” (Pancasila Village) that Sukoreno is known for. Thus, a case can be made that both sides agree to maintain the appearance of nominal

83 Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sanggar Candi Busana Sapta Darma, October 14, 2023.

84 Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sukoreno Village, May 23, 2024.

85 Erving Goffman explains social interaction in terms of theatrical performance in which every person plays their roles in a specific social context. They act, “accordingly, verbally and/or otherwise.” Every action is curated to create a specific impression on others who interacted with them. Erving Goffman cited in: Dayakisni and Hudaniah, *Psikologi Sosial*, 69.

86 Dayakisni and Hudaniah, *Psikologi Sosial*, 69.



Figure 4. The *musalla*'s loudspeaker is located outside, right at the corner of its entryway (Photo source: Field observation in Sukoreno, 2024).

interreligious peace (the absence of direct violence) by way of impression management, though structural interreligious violence through which the followers of Sapta Darma have been marginalized remains unresolved.

In the contestation between religious majority and minority groups in Sukoreno, Sapta Darma followers are not only motivated to sustain their social statuses, but also to strengthen their identity as a group. Nevertheless, a similar process of impression management is also being done by religious majority groups in Sukoreno in their daily encounters with Sapta Darma followers. Contesting claims over what the *musalla* loudspeaker's means show that impression management is being deployed by both sides to present certain images in Sukoreno. As previously mentioned, the Muslim community claims that the *musalla*'s loudspeaker represents the interreligious harmony that Sukoreno is famous for. Yet, we can also see how disturbing the loudspeaker is for the followers of Sapta Darma whose house of worship is in front of the *musalla* (Figure 4). When we consider the hegemonic presence of the Muslim community in Sukoreno, we can certainly see that the *musalla*'s loudspeaker can also be interpreted as a form of interreligious provocation, as much as it is a symbol of interreligious harmony.

Interreligious contestation through the deployment of impression management can also be observed from a sticker that can commonly be found on the windows of the houses of Sapta Darma's followers. The sticker, written in Javanese script reads: "Sing wis waras ngalah" (Those who are wise retreat from the fight) (Figure 5). In our interviews, they explained that the sticker means, "those who own healthy minds (waras), including those



Figure 5. The sticker reads “Sing waras ngalah” in Javanese script on the window of the house of a follower of Sapta Darma (Photo source: Field observation, Sukoreno Village, 2024).

who are wise, would usually retreat from a fight.”⁸⁷ In this context, the sticker can be understood as a passive resistance against the interreligious discriminations that they experience, while presenting a form of spatial claim in which their homes become the place where they can freely express their pain and disappointment.⁸⁸

As with many believers of indigenous traditions in Indonesia, many Sapta Darma followers employ conversion strategy—where they converted into one of the state-acknowledged religions—to repel interreligious discrimination.⁸⁹ Some of our interviewees shared that they listed Islam as their religion on their national IDs and family cards, even though they practice the teachings of Sapta Darma in their lives. Some others even paid

87 Interviews with Sapta Darma followers, Sukoreno Village, October 15, 2023.

88 It is important to consider that the term “ngalah” (retreat from the fight) is also an aspect of Sapta Darma’s philosophy concerning the ways we ought to socially conduct ourselves. A Tembang Mijil (song containing advice for life) from the teachings of Sapta Darma mentioned the term: “Dedalane guna lawan sekti; Kudu andhap asor; Wani *ngalah* luhur wekasane; Tumungkula yen dipun dukani; Bapang den simpangi; Ana catur mungkur.” (To gain knowledge and gnostic power; [We] should be humble and polite; Retreat from the fight, [then] we will be noble in the future; Bow your head [when] someone warns [or] angry at you; Avoid all challenges; Do not pay attention to those who humiliate you). Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 28.

89 For more analysis on such strategy see: Rosita Albert, Adina Schneeweis, and Iva Knobbe, “Strengthening, Hiding or Relinquishing Ethnic Identity in Response to Threat: Implications for Intercultural Relations,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 14, no.1 (2005): 107–118, 107.



Figure 6. A *tahlilan* organized by a Sapta Darma family with mostly Muslim attendants (Photo source: Field observation, 2024).

people from the state-acknowledged religions to represent them in the government offices to process their national IDs and family cards due to the fear that they would not be given one when the officers know that they follow the teachings of Sapta Darma.⁹⁰

More than just hiding their religious identity when dealing with government bureaucracy, the followers of Sapta Darma also adapt to the culture of religious majority groups, especially in social and religious activities.⁹¹ In 2016, Sapta Darma community in Sukoreno applied for a building permit in which they said that they were going to build a “pura” (Hindu temple) instead of “sanggar” (Sapta Darma’s house of worship). The strategy was implemented so that the application would be approved. Unfortunately, a person outside of the community knew of the plan and reported their “lies” to the head of the village, who proceeded to cancel the application.⁹² In addition, the followers of Sapta Darma in Sukoreno are also known to actively participate in Muslim’s activities such as *tahlilan* (seven days of communal Muslim prayers after someone passed away) and *pengajian* (communal forums to learn about and recite from the Qur’an) to the extent that they adopt those activities as their own (Figure 6). However, many Muslim leaders in Sukoreno—as represented by previously mentioned views

90 Interview with Sapta Darma followers, Sukoreno Village, December 29, 2023.

91 Interview with Sapta Darma followers, Sukoreno Village, October 14, 2024.

92 The *sanggar* was then proceeded to be built in 2020 on land privately owned by a Sapta Darma follower. As previously mentioned, the Muslim community then followed suit by building a *musalla* not far from the sanggar: Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sukoreno Village, October 14, 2023.

of Ustadz Muhammad and Mrs. Sutini—perceive them as the proof of a weak faith of Sapta Darma’s followers.

For all the pejorative perceptions that the religious majority groups, especially Muslims have about Sapta Darma followers, the followers of Sapta Darma also form their own perceptions on the religious majority groups.⁹³ Considering the designation of Sukoreno as a Pancasila village, many Sapta Darma followers perceive themselves as “nationalists” while labelling the religious majority groups who discriminate against them as a bunch of “fanatics.” The “nationalists” label that they attached to themselves refer to the display of respect for each other religious traditions that shape interreligious harmony in Sukoreno, while fanaticism is defined as an exclusivist approach to religious pluralism expressed through the surveillance and prohibition of non-Islamic religious events, and obstacles to build the house of worship for religious traditions that are not acknowledged by the state.⁹⁴

The contestation, compromise, adaptation, strategy of concealment, and discrimination that characterize interreligious relations in Sukoreno show that interreligious harmony cannot be achieved simply by sticking a label on a religiously diverse village. Unless there are serious efforts to address the interreligious injustices that religious minority groups have been subjected to, the status of Pancasila Village for Sukoreno only reflects two things, viz., (1) an imposition of interreligious peace that comes from the state, and (2) a superficial understanding of the interreligious dynamics in Sukoreno that betrays the discrimination and structural violence suffered by its religious minority groups. In the last section of this paper, we will analyze the religious majority-minority relations in Sukoreno that gives us an alternative understanding of what “religious co-production” means within the context of religious diversity characterized by hierarchical interreligious relations.

93 Among these pejorative perceptions are: dirty people, pig eater, strayed people, people with weak faith, stupid and ignorant, backward, and sun worshippers.

94 Such perception is also held by some members of the Hindu community in Sukoreno whose Nyepi festival was previously cancelled (but then following a negotiation was conducted under a heavy surveillance) due to the fact that it took place during the month of Ramadan in 2024. Interview with Sapta Darma followers, 2024.

Political Co-Production of “Religion” and Power Hierarchy in an Interreligious Context

While religious co-production is defined as the formation, reformation, and transformation of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in relation to each other, the interreligious context in Sukoreno Village allows us to see “co-produced religions” as a social and political process of co-production of “religion” as a category, i.e., the relationship between Sapta Darma and state-acknowledged religions in Sukoreno is one in which “religion” (*agama*) as a status is being contested through multiple methods of religionization.⁹⁵

In the work of Marianne Moyaert and Markus Dreßler, religionization is explained as a process of defining “religion” through two kinds of differentiation. The first differentiation occurs in the context of social relations in which interpersonal/intergroup “selfing” and “othering” consolidate the exclusivity of religious borders.⁹⁶ While the second differentiation takes place at a conceptual level in which religionization is accompanied by secularization that in turn strengthen the rigidity of religious borders.⁹⁷ Yet, as Picard writes, religionization in a postcolonial society is also a result of colonial encounter in which the modern/colonial category of religion is imposed on colonized subjects, who then responded by religionizing their faith and spirituality to participate in a colonial discourse.⁹⁸ What is important to consider at this point is that as a form of coloniality of power and being, religionization is not a one-off process that only happened during the colonial encounter, but rather a continuous one that morphs into new forms of unequal relations in postcolonial contexts.⁹⁹ An analysis of religionization in a postcolonial context then, as Picard argues, should focus on “what is identified and legitimized as ‘religion’, by whom, for what purpose, in which circumstances and under which political conditions.”¹⁰⁰

95 Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 7.

96 Moyaert, *Christian Imaginations*, 1.

97 Dreßler, “Modes of Religionization,” 3.

98 Michel Picard, “Introduction: ‘Agama’, ‘Adat’, and Pancasila,” in *The Politics of Religion in Indonesia: Syncretism, Orthodoxy, and Religious Contention in Java and Bali*, eds. Michel Picard and Rémy Madinier (Routledge, 2011), 2.

99 Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580; Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

100 Picard, “Introduction,” 3.

This is where an expansion of the concept of religious co-production is needed. Instead of looking at how members of different religions shared the continuous process of construction and reconstruction of their traditions, within a postcolonial context such as Indonesia what ought to be interrogated first and foremost is how the category of “religion” is created and used to exclude the other. Hence, this paper provides an analysis on social and political aspects of co-production of “religion,” that is how the concept of “religion”—in its Indonesian equivalent of “agama”—is constructed and reconstructed through a network of interreligious and religion-and-state relations.

Looking at the case of co-production of “religion” in Sukoreno, we propose three different meanings of the concept that are inseparable from each other: the institutional, the interreligious, and the paradigmatic. “Institutional” here refers to the process of co-production of “religion” in which the imposition of “religion” as a category by the state is also sustained through gatekeeping practices done by those whose religions are acknowledged as such by the state. On the other hand, the “interreligious” meaning of co-production of “religion” concerns the ways members of state-acknowledged religions, through daily interpersonal relations and neighborhood socialization, integrate non-state acknowledged religious minority groups into the fold of world religion paradigm by normativizing hegemonic religious practices. Finally, the “paradigmatic” meaning of co-production of “religion” indicates the religionization process of non-state acknowledged traditions through adoption of the term and/or, “rationalization—the formulation of a canonical corpus, its institutionalization and its effective socialization [...]—as well as by secularization—desacralization of the immanent concrete in favor of an abstract and transcendent divine [...]—along with scripturalization and standardized practices.”¹⁰¹

As previously discussed in the introduction and the first section of this paper, the imposition of the category of “agama” (religion) by the state is not only rooted in myopic colonial paradigm, but also historically served as a form of political concession to Islamic factions during the birth of the republic. As a political category, “agama” (religion) as a status in Indonesia comes with economic and political advantages that significantly defined what it means to be an Indonesian citizen. On the contrary, the absence of “agama” (religion) as a status—and thus acknowledgment of the state—for many minorities religious groups indicate the lack of rights and protection

101 Picard, “Introduction,” 2.

for their believers. Such benefits create incentives for those who belong to state-acknowledged religions to gatekeep their status, and along with the state's discriminatory policies, filter those who deserve the status from those who do not.

Our conversations with Andi, a young Sapta Darma community leader, revealed his disappointment with the fact that even with the Constitutional Court's recent decision to allow *aliran kepercayaan* to be listed on national IDs and family cards, the status of "agama" is still cannot be applied to Sapta Darma. Andi commented, "the new policy that allows us to list *aliran kepercayaan* on our ID and family cards is also the result of a political process. And we do not have any other options except to accept it. Of course, we still want to be different too, like 'agama: Islam', [or] 'agama: Hindu'. But we also know that who has the power, that is the one who wins."¹⁰² For Andi, the listing of "aliran kepercayaan" as a general category in lieu of the specific name of the tradition (Sapta Darma, or any other *aliran kepercayaan* in Indonesia) serves as a reminder that his religion will never be acknowledged as "agama" and accorded the specification that *agama* has in Indonesia. Andi is fully aware that as a product of political process, the designation of 'agama' will only be accorded to powerful groups, and not to his religious tradition due to their minority status. Andi further commented, "[If aliran kepercayaan can be classified as agama] I would be very happy because [my tradition] would finally be equal with others. *Our true identity is believers of a religion [Sapta Darma]*. As it is now, it [our religious identity] is being generalized [as aliran kepercayaan]. Meanwhile, for example, Sapta Darma is different from Ilmu Sejati [another aliran kepercayaan], but our government thinks that we are just the same."¹⁰³

On the other hand, many Muslim community leaders in Sukoreno classified Sapta Darma as *aliran kepercayaan* by invoking orthodoxy in which they highlight the fact that Sapta Darma does not have any specific body of religious law, nor an exclusivist religious identity. The term "sesat" (strayed, lost) is commonly used to characterize Sapta Darma, and to deny them the designation of "agama." In this context, institutional co-production of "religion" transpires through the imposition of state's understanding of *agama* that is enforced by law and thus legally differentiates between *agama* and non-*agama*. These legalistic differences then enforced through daily interreligious encounters in which members of the state-acknowledged religions gatekeep the concept of "agama" by identifying lacks exclusivist

102 Interview with Andi, Sukoreno Village, October 14, 2023.

103 Italics are ours: Ibid.

aspects of religionization in Sapta Darma that then served as proofs to classify Sapta Darma as “aliran kepercayaan” and not as an “agama.”

Yet, institutional co-production of religion—or should we say, *agama*—is not the only process that takes place in Sukoreno. The hegemonic presence of Islam and Muslims in the village means that some Islamic practices become parts of the social life in which non-Muslims, including the followers of Sapta Darma, were expected to attend. The ubiquity of *tahlil* and other forms of Muslim-based *selametans* made Islamic culture and practices into inseparable dimensions of the village’s social life, and it is in this setting that Muslim community leaders in Sukoreno seize the opportunity to integrate Sapta Darma’s followers into their Islamic life.¹⁰⁴ Responding to our question about what her take on the fact that Sapta Darma’s followers participate in *tahlil* and *selametan*, Mrs. Sutini said, “we Muslims are happy when they participate in our activities because it is a part of our syiar [propagation]. When they participate in our activities, they might realize how good the Muslim community is, and we are happy that they have the opportunity to witness it.”¹⁰⁵

Interreligious co-production of religion in Sukoreno refers to such process of integrating Sapta Darma’s followers into the fold of a state-acknowledged religion through daily socialization process. Though Muslims are certainly at the forefront of this practice, followers of other state-acknowledged religions have also been trying to pull Sapta Darma’s followers into their traditions. The formal position of the Indonesian government that allows for—and supports—religious propagation towards those who are seen as having no religion provides a legal protection for this practice. Mrs. Sutini openly shared with us that often time she would persuade her Sapta Darma neighbors to come to her Qur’an study sessions and demand they wear hijabs to attend it.¹⁰⁶ In a similar note, Ustadz Muhammad came up with a story in which a dead Sapta Darma follower whose corpse he cared for in an Islamic funerary ritual came into his dream and others and told him that he had converted into Islam in the hereafter.¹⁰⁷

104 Muslim-based *selametans* comes from the word, *selamet*, which means safe and sound in Javanese. *Selametan* is a form of Islamic communal gathering that is conducted for various reasons (death, wedding, birth, circumcision, etc.) in which attendants read from the Qur’an and pray together for the benefit of the host. Communal meals would then be served at the end of the prayer and were believed to bring blessings for all of the attendants.

105 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, Sukoreno Village, November 1, 2023.

106 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, Sukoreno Village, November 1, 2023.

107 Interview with Ustadz Muhammad, April 20, 2024.

Interreligious co-production of “agama” reflects a national anxiety about the place of *aliran kepercayaan* within the Indonesian mosaic of religious diversity. On one hand, the state and members of state-acknowledged religions gatekeep the definition of “agama” in the ways that make it impossible for *aliran kepercayaan* to gain legal status. On the other, the fact that *aliran kepercayaan* is acknowledged as belief systems in Indonesia beyond the boundary of “agama” produce a perceived sense of threat to the state-acknowledged religions that the followers of *aliran kepercayaan* were seen as legitimate targets for various missionary approaches and activities. In this case, religionization works through the promise of social recognition¹⁰⁸ in which members of *aliran kepercayaan* were pushed, demanded, and conditioned to embrace state-acknowledged religions and—that way—come into the fold of social logic of *agama*.

Nevertheless, the followers of Sapta Darma are not passive subjects in this network of interreligious dynamics. Mostly, as parts of their adaptation strategy and coping mechanism in Sukoreno, the followers of Sapta Darma socialized themselves in the culture and practices of state-acknowledged religions. Andi, as parts of his survival strategy during his school years, practiced Islamic rituals and claimed a Muslim identity in public settings. He had been getting used to do an Islamic *solat* (Muslim’s daily five times prayer) that he said he actually could get to the state of “*ening*” (spiritual tranquility in Sapta Darma’s teaching that is reached through one’s spiritual unification with Godi) by doing a Muslim prayer. Furthermore, to complete his public identity as a Muslim Andi was also active as a leader of mosque youth organization in his locale during his teenage years.¹⁰⁹ Another Sapta Darma follower in Sukoreno, Mrs. Sari shared with us that she happily wears hijab when she goes to the village’s social functions because hijab made her look prettier and boosted her confidence.¹¹⁰ Mrs. Sari’s testimony about hijab lined up well with Mrs. Sutini’s perspective on the ubiquitousness of hijab in Sukoreno in which she said that hijab is no longer an exclusively Muslim

108 “Social recognition refers to the social-psychological, ethical, and political practices through which actors evaluate, acknowledge, and otherwise engage their fellows in society social recognition refers to the more general and less state-focused processes through which actors perceive, categorize, and evaluate their social fellows within a particular sociopolitical community and then draw on those processes of recognition to understand and enact their own identities, rights, and obligations in relation to those around them,” (Robert W. Hefner, “The Politics and Ethics of Social Recognition and Citizenship in a Muslim-Majority Democracy,” in *Indonesian Pluralities: Islam, Citizenship, and Democracy*, eds. Robert W. Hefner and Zainal Abidin Bagir [University of Notre Dame Press, 2021], 2–3).

109 Interview with Andi, Sukoreno Village, October 15, 2023.

110 Interview with Mrs. Sari, Sukoreno Village, October 15, 2023.

women's identity since most of the women in Sukoreno—regardless of their religious affiliation—would wear one outside of their houses and/or when they attend any social functions.¹¹¹

In a setting where the perspective on religion is saturated with a legalistic understanding of what *agama* supposed to look like, the adoption of ubiquitous Islamic culture and practices by the followers of Sapta Darma can be seen as a paradigmatic co-production of *agama*. In this case, religionization takes place through the followers' self-socialization into the culture and practices of the state-acknowledged religions as they attempt to conform to their social surroundings. Paradigmatic co-production of religion complements interreligious co-production in explaining the dynamics of co-production of religion that occur amidst the unequal relations between religious majority and minority groups in the Indonesian context.

Institutional, interreligious, and paradigmatic co-productions of religion call our attention to two aspects. First, that the process of religious co-production does not always happen on an equal basis between two or more religious traditions. In this case, religious minority groups are expected to adopt and adapt more than the majority groups do. And second, that in addition to the intra-religious processes of construction and reconstruction, religious co-production can also be understood as the interreligious fashioning and re-fashioning of what "religion" is. In postcolonial Indonesia, this process is characterized by the contestation of the definition of "agama" that serves as a means of oppression for religious minority groups, while also becoming a paradigm for them to gain the right to freely practice their faiths as "religious believers."

Conclusion

By expanding the definition of religious co-production into the conceptual and political production of "religion" in an interreligious context, we argue that interreligious relations can also be deployed to discriminate against religious others. In Sukoreno Village, "agama" as a state-acknowledged status that comes with its own political and material advantages is used as a shared foundation to alienate religious minority groups whose presence is not acknowledged by the state.

The paper begins with a socio-historical analysis of the ongoing conceptualization of "agama" in Indonesia, and the ways in which *aliran*

111 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, Sukoreno Village, November 1, 2023.

kepercayaan negotiates their presence within the hegemonic imposition of a specific definition of religion by the state. The paper then presents the case of Sukoreno that is known as a Pancasila Village and praised nationwide for its seemingly peaceful interreligious life. Through 2023–2024 fieldwork research in Sukoreno, we found that the impression of interreligious peace in Sukoreno betrays a more complex picture of interreligious contestation in which the followers of Sapta Darma were discriminated against due to their status as a non-state acknowledged religious entity. Through a close reading of ethnographic data from the field, we propose three different meanings of co-production of religion to explain the intricacy of interreligious cooperation and contestation in Sukoreno.

Institutional co-production of religion highlights the ties between the state and the religious majority groups in defining, sustaining, and gatekeeping the definition of “agama” as an Indonesian equivalent of religion. Interreligious co-production of religion refers to the ways that the members of state-acknowledged religions try to integrate those who fall outside of the logic of “agama” into it by persuading and socializing them in the culture and practices of the state-acknowledged religions, especially Islam. Lastly, paradigmatic co-production of religion indicates the efforts taken by religious minority groups to religionize themselves by adopting the culture and practices of state-acknowledged religions.

The fluidity of interreligious relations, and the constructed quality of “religion” as a category are two important aspects of this paper that invite us to pay attention to the structure of power in any interreligious context. In addition to looking at how religious traditions have shaped each other throughout history, we contend that it is also equally important to see how the very concept of “religion” has been constructed and reconstructed interreligiously. Most importantly, we assert that the interreligious conceptualization of “religion” in postcolonial contexts like Indonesia are often used to alienate and discriminate the religiously minoritized others whose struggle in gaining rights to practice their tradition is critically important in achieving a genuine interreligious peace.

Lailatul Fitriyah, Ph.D is an Associate Professor of Interreligious Education at the Claremont School of Theology in Los Angeles. She is also currently a Visiting Professor at Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto, Canada. **Indah Roziah Cholilah, M.Psi** is a Lecturer at the Department of Islamic Psychology, Faculty of Dakwah, Islamic State University of Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq in Jember, East Java, Indonesia. Her work focuses on the integration of the field of social psychology with Islamic values and perspectives.

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ARTICLE

Ghazali and Aquinas for a Posthumous Dialogue on the Possibility of an Eternally Created World

Sana Tayyen

Abstract

This article is a comparative study between arguably one of the greatest Christian theologians and philosophers, St. Thomas Aquinas, and one of the greatest Muslim theologians and philosophers, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. I engage in a textual, analytical, close reading of the classical texts written by Aquinas and Ghazali on the Aristotelian argument of an eternal world. I explore the possibility of posthumous interreligious dialogue that begins in the classical tradition of both Christianity and Islam and aim to create parallels between Ghazali and Aquinas even where perhaps they were silent, resulting in an exercise of comparative theology. Both Ghazali and Aquinas were dedicated to the integrity of human reason which is evidenced through their writings on the creation of an eternal world. They were not against philosophy, rather, their arguments were against the *falāsifa* who rendered God without a divine will. Through their commitment to reason and divine revelation, Quranic and Biblical respectively, the argument is made that perhaps Ghazali and Aquinas were closer to each other as theologians of differing religions than either of the two were to the Avicennian or Aristotelian philosophical tradition which they were immersed in.

Keywords

Ghazali, Aquinas, eternity of the world, medieval theology, *falsafa*, philosophy, Islam, Latin, Catholic Church, *creatio ex nihilo*

Those that defend and succeed have become giants within their respective religious institutions. They are heroes for defending the faith, for making their beliefs and practices plausible, maintainable, and alive. Every religious tradition has these heroes; their ideas and teachings are cited among the scholars while also being remembered by their learned congregation as wise and powerful historic leaders of the past. As a Muslim who is interested in making connections across religious traditions and creating various spaces for dialogue, I highlight two heroes, giants that is, one from Islam and the other from Christianity whose voices have remained alive in their respective traditions for close to or near a millennium, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, the Muslim theologian, sufi, and philosopher and Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Christian theologian and philosopher. Through my research, I aim to advance the point that despite the often-cited differences between Ghazali and Aquinas, whether it be their religion, their theologies, or their seeming positions on philosophy, I find instead that both theologians have a shared affinity for the divine, and a shared dedication to philosophy. The integrity of rational argument is maintained throughout their philosophical discussions particularly as they engage the theologies of Avicenna. Thus, in this paper, I bring both Ghazali and Aquinas together as partners for posthumous interreligious dialogue on God's free will and power to create. Their affinities led them to make very similar arguments for the credibility of their religious beliefs specifically in defending a created, non-eternal world.

Both Ghazali and Aquinas defended the free will of God and his power to act upon his will in the face of a *falsafa* tradition that depicted God's greatness through ultimate simplicity. As Frank Griffel defends philosophy in Islam after Ghazali, he rightly clarifies *falsafa* as only a small segment of the greater philosophical tradition within Islamic philosophy. *Falsafa* occupied itself with Avicennian philosophy that promoted Aristotelian propositions on God's being and essence, mainly as a divine simplicity without the will to act, the ability to know particulars, and the ability to exist in any form or relation to change. Griffel writes, "This implies that, first, Avicenna's God cannot change and, second, He acts without exercising a free choice between alternative actions. The first point implies that God cannot change from being a noncreator to becoming a creator. This results in Avicenna's teaching of a pre-eternal world."¹ The proposition of a pre-eternal or uncreated world was rejected by both Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and St. Thomas Aquinas. Both were dedicated to theologies, Muslim and Christian respectively, that rejected such propositions and deemed them to be heretical.

1 Frank Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 10.

Ghazali and Aquinas would engage deeply into both *falsafa* and philosophy to rebut through rational argumentation the proposition of a necessarily pre-eternal world while remaining committed to the usage of syllogisms and rational methods evidence to support their own philosophical arguments.

On the surface, Ghazali and Aquinas have seemed to many readers quite different from each other in their interaction with *falsafa*. Those familiar with the works of Ghazali and Aquinas would quickly understand David Burrell's first lines in his comparative work as he underscores the disparity of comparative analysis done on these two religious leaders, respective to their communities.² "Since the direct links between al-Ghazali and Thomas Aquinas are tenuous at best, one is not invited to compare these two thinkers as naturally as one would compare Aquinas with Averroes or Avicenna."³ The differences in their style and tone often overpower the text and the similarities are easily overlooked. Aquinas and Ghazali not only differed in terms of their respective religions and revelations but also in their individual writing styles. Where Ghazali was provocative, Aquinas was composed. Where Ghazali was writing a defensive text solely to refute the philosophers in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, Aquinas was writing a manual, the *Summa Theologia* or the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, on incorporating a philosophical voice into Christian theology. In mentioning the "romantic aura" style in which Ghazali wrote, Richard Frank asserts, "He (Ghazali) was no Aquinas!"⁴ Despite these differences, a comparative reader cannot ignore similarities found between the two theologians, from a shared devotion towards the power and will of God to a careful interactive balance between reason and revelation. I advance the idea that a posthumous interreligious exchange between the two theologians could begin from their defense of a created world and their commitment to using the philosophical tradition as a tool in that defense. Hence, this would make them excellent interlocuters for interreligious dialogue particularly in defending the omnipotence and will of God while maintaining a consistency with their philosophical world view.

In this paper, I highlight arguments that both Ghazali and Aquinas make in defending their respective faiths in a created world, not by necessity

- 2 More recent work is making room for comparison between Ghazali and Aquinas. Eward Omar Moad's work does make reference to Aquinas's arguments when discussing Ghazali. See, Moad, "Al-Ghazali's Position on the 'Second Proof' of the 'Philosophers' for the Eternity of the World, in the First Discussion of the Incoherence of the Philosophers" *Sophia*, 54, no. 4. (2015): 429–441.
- 3 David Burrell, "Ghazali and Aquinas on the Names of God," *Journal of Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (1989): 173–180.
- 4 Richard Frank, "Al-Ghazali's Use of Avicenna's Philosophy," *Revue des études Islamiques* 55–57 (1987–89): 271–284.

of God's essence or being, but by his free will and creative action. Despite coming from two separate religions and starting off from two separate scriptures, I demonstrate that the Muslim and Christian sides of the debate were not simply on opposite sides of one another; rather, many times they shared the same side of the argument, and for Ghazali that meant the side against other Muslims, particularly Muslim *falāsifa* or Aristotelian philosophers from the *falsafa* tradition within Islamic philosophy. When the two theologians believed that the power, will, and knowledge of God became challenged indirectly by the Muslim philosopher, Avicenna, through his cosmology of emanation and the active intellect, there is clear evidence that both Ghazali and Aquinas were provoked to counter what they thought was an affront on God. Although Avicenna was a Muslim, we will see that the distance between Ghazali and Avicenna was greater at certain points of theological thought, mainly God's divine will, power, and knowledge, than the distance between Ghazali and Aquinas on these issues. Robert Elias Abu Shanab highlights this point in his comparative writings on Ghazali and Aquinas when he states, "For all these objections that St. Thomas leveled at the Arabic Philosophers were to a large extent the same objections that Ghazali raised against his predecessors, especially Avicenna."⁵ Further, when we reflect upon the creative act of God, we can begin to imagine a kind of posthumous conversation between these two intellectual giants. Such a comparative vision allows us to see their shared commitment to rational argumentation, while also suggesting that both al-Ghazali and Aquinas might have been willing to defend the possibility of a pre-eternal world—so on as its existence depended entirely on God's will and creative agency.

On God's Will: Creating the Eternal or the Temporal World and the Possibility of What is Not

One of the most central discussions and/or debates that raged throughout the Middle Ages among the religious and intellectual elites was the question of the eternity of the world. Is the earth co-eternal with God or is the earth a temporal creation of God; that is, did it have a beginning? Theologians among the Muslim and Christian establishments passionately argued this question within their religious circles revealing the greater complexity of the relationship between reason and revelation. The voices of Ghazali and Aquinas were critical within this debate in their respective circles. Their

5 Robert Elias Abu Shanab, "Points of Encounter between Al-Ghazali and St. Thomas Aquinas," *Tommaso d'Aquino Nella Storia Del Pensiero* 1 (1975): 261–267, 266.

arguments maintained a consistent commitment to the principles of reason, never utilizing the authority of revelation to respond to the philosophical propositions that they felt challenged that authority. In this way, each time they undermined the proposition of the philosophers through arguments based on logic, they raised the credibility level of their respective religious beliefs. For example, by arguing against the proposition that “From the eternal, only an eternal can proceed” through reason, Ghazali and Aquinas were able to maintain the possibility and credibility of their respective theologies which allowed for the assertion, “From the eternal a temporal can proceed.”⁶

We will examine key positions that Ghazali and Aquinas held on the controversial philosophical proposition *de eternitate mundi*, the eternity of the world. We will see how for both Ghazali and Aquinas it was important for them to maintain God’s temporal priority to the creation of the world and God’s limitless will. Further, we will examine some of the arguments that Ghazali and Aquinas were involved in for defense of the temporality of the world that was derived from Islamic and Christian doctrine respectively. This will reveal their technique of applying the tools of the philosophers to refute specific philosophical propositions that were thought to be “necessary,” and which negated religious truth claims. What was said to be a necessary conclusion by Avicennian philosophy or *falsafa* based upon so-called principles of reason were assessed and argued by both Ghazali and Aquinas to show that what was deemed philosophically necessary was not necessarily so. In this comparison and focus on the arguments against the eternity of the world, it will become evident that a posthumous dialogue between Ghazali and Aquinas could bear a fruitful exchange where the Proof of Islam and the Doctor of the Church may see eye to eye on the majesty of God and the role of philosophy in matters of revelation.

The concept of creation *ex nihilo* was historically introduced by the Jewish and Christian biblical tradition. The ancient Greeks that preceded Judaism did not possess the idea that creation could emerge from nothing; rather, they held to the idea that pre-existing matter was necessary, and that God is the witness of it, not its direct cause. “God moves or activates the universal machine but does not create it.”⁷ In contrast, Ghazali and Aquinas both inherited the view from their respective Muslim and Christian theologies that the only eternal being that existed was God; everything other

6 Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 13.

7 Thomas Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi in St. Thomas Aquinas on the Eternity of the World and Selected Miscellaneous Texts*, trans. Cyril Vollert (Marquette University, 1964), 7.

than God came into existence and had a beginning. “This theological understanding was contrary to the view which Greek and Arabic (Avicenna) philosophers [or the *falāsifa*] taught, for whom any beginning of the world’s existence is unacceptable.”⁸ Ghazali and Aquinas each stood as authoritative voices within their respective theological traditions—Ghazali within the dominant Ash’arite school of Sunni Islam and Aquinas within the framework of Catholic teaching on Christian revelation. Both theological views rejected the idea of an eternally subsisting universe that existed by necessity through God’s very being. Instead, Ash’arite theology and the Catholic Church taught that the world passed from non-being into being through God’s will and creative act, not through any necessity of God’s essence. The proposition proposed by the *falāsifa* would ultimately render God without a will and creative agency.

The Ash’arite theological position on the creation of a temporal world stated that “All men of true religion hold that the world had an origin as the object of God’s creation. “God was and there was naught with Him.”⁹ The Catholic Church’s theological position on the temporal world rested on the Fourth Lateran council of 1215, Canon 1, which declared the temporal beginning of the world to be an article of faith. “We firmly believe and openly confess that there is only one true God, eternal ... who from the beginning of time and by His omnipotent power made from nothing creatures both spiritual and corporeal, angelic.”¹⁰

The debates within the religious circles of the Middle Ages would become more complicated when philosophers would shoulder Aristotelian ideas and couch them in religious terminology, yet the concepts would be quite distinct from their original religious intention. For Ghazali, the case of Avicennian philosophy would speak potently to this matter. In fact, the entire *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa, Incoherence of the Philosophers* was written precisely for the refutation of the Hellenistic ideas that Ghazali felt seeped into Islamic teachings mainly through the philosophy of Avicenna and al-Farabi, hence the *falsafa* tradition. Their metaphysics were derived from Aristotle and did not possess the authoritative backing of revelation or the convincing

- 8 Muammer Iskenderoglu, *Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World*, (Brill, 2002), 2.
- 9 Al-Shahrastani, *Kitab Nihayatu’l-Iqdam Fi ‘l-Kalam in The Summa Philosophiae of Al-Shahrastani*, trans. Alfred Guillaume, (Oxford University Press; Humphrey Milford: 1934), 1.
- 10 “Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215: The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215,” Medieval Sourcebook, published by Fordham University, last modified July 12, 2024, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp>.

arguments of the principles of reason. According to Ghazali, those who denied the religious confessions and adapted the confessions of the philosophers were abandoning the righteous imitation of true belief to the destructive imitation of false belief. Ghazali asks, “What rank in God’s world is there that is lower than the rank of one who adorns himself with the abandonment of the truth that is traditionally believed by the hasty embracing of the false as true, accepting it without reliable report and verification?”¹¹ Since the *falāsifa*’s propositions, such as Avicenna’s proposition of an eternally uncreated world, were undermined by Ghazali’s rational arguments, then those *falāsifa* were simply believers in previous philosophical assertions of truth rather than believers in divine revelation.

Aquinas will take on a similar attitude. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas states, “Since, however, many have held that the world has been always and of necessity, and have endeavored to prove this, it remains for us to give their arguments, so as to show that they do not necessarily prove the eternity of the world.”¹² After investigating a large varying degree of arguments for and against the eternity of the world and refuting the arguments that claim the necessity of an eternal world, Aquinas closes his chapters on the eternity of the world in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* with a final statement giving us a picture of his view on this subject. “From what has been said,” writes Aquinas, “we are unable to avoid the various errors of the pagan philosophers. Some of whom asserted the eternity of the world; others asserted that the matter of the world is eternal, out of which at a certain time the world began to be formed; either by chance; or by some intellect; or else by attraction and repulsion. For all these suppose something eternal beside God: which is incompatible with the Catholic faith.”¹³ The “taking for granted” implies the baseless claim of eternity in something besides God. Hence, like Ghazali, he makes the claim that since there was no revelation to affirm eternity, it was left to be an idea that was shouldered only because it was there as an attractive notion and not because there was anything to substantiate it, whether by the authority of reason or by the authority of revelation. We can imagine Ghazali and Aquinas agreeing that those advancing Aristotelian or Avicennian arguments, and whose credibility failed under rational scrutiny, were essentially believing in an eternally uncreated world rather than upholding divine revelation.

11 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 2.

12 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles in On the Eternity of the World* [hereafter *SCG*], trans. Cyril Vollert (Marquette University Press, 1964), II.32.

13 Aquinas, *SCG* II.38.

To remain within the main scope of this article, I will not be thoroughly communicating the theory and arguments for the eternity of the world; but rather, I will use the theory and arguments for the eternity of the world only to demonstrate the distinctions and points of intersection between Ghazali and Aquinas. This will allow us a clear view of the interaction of reason and revelation in their respective work and allow us to make the case for their posthumous partnership as interlocutors in defending and promoting both their theological positions on the will of God, his majesty, and his eternity, and their position on maintaining the usage of credible Aristotelian philosophical propositions of their day. This, in turn, allows us to see Ghazali's position on these key arguments as closer to Aquinas than to the Muslim *falāsifa*, whose assertions conflicted with both Islamic and Christian theology—especially in their defense of an eternally uncreated world.

Although, one can find Ghazali underscoring his arguments safeguarding God free from any necessities in various places like his writings on God's 99 attributes, *Al-Maqsid*, for the most part, Ghazali explicates and argues against the doctrine of the eternity of the world mainly in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*.¹⁴ He refutes the top three proofs of the philosophers while beginning with the philosophical proposition of the eternity of the world:

That it has never ceased to exist with God, exalted be He, to be an effect of His, to exist along with Him, not being posterior to Him in time, in the way the effect coexists along with the cause and light along with the sun; that the Creator's priority to the world is like the priority of the cause to the effect, which is a priority in essence and rank, not in time... The doctrine of all of them is that the world is pre-eternal and that altogether it is basically inconceivable for a temporal being to proceed from the eternal without mediation.¹⁵

His goal is to demonstrate the blunder of the philosophers and the incoherence of the said proposition.

In the case of Aquinas, we find three main works with which he deals specifically with the concept of the eternity of the world: *De Aeternitate Mundi*, *On the Eternity of the World*, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and *Summa Theologiae*. Each of these major works deals with this issue in a distinctive fashion. The *Summa*

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- 14 For example, although not directly arguing against the proposition of a coeternal world to God's being, Richard M. Frank points out Ghazali's writings in his *Maqsid* affirming God's freedom from any necessity of his being. Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazali and Avicenna* (Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), 68.
- 15 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 12.

Contra Gentiles is more like the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* because Aquinas, like Ghazali, engages in the proofs to demonstrate their incoherence, and to make the point that the proofs set forth to us by the philosophers do not demonstrate the necessity of an eternal world, thus giving the believer stronger credence for the truth of revelation. In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas designates two articles: “Whether the Created Universe Has Existed Forever?” and “Whether it is an article of Faith that the World had a Beginning.”¹⁶ The simple position that Aquinas deals with throughout his writings is twofold: first, the possibility of an eternal world and second, whether the world is or isn’t eternal.¹⁷

The Actual and the Possible

One point of emphasis that should be made explicit in the beginning of our analysis and to help us see the remainder of their arguments is the difference between the positions that Ghazali and Aquinas are directly dealing with in their main arguments on the eternity of the world. While they are dealing with essentially the same topic, there is a major difference that will affect the type of response accorded. For the most part, Ghazali is dealing specifically with the proposition “that the world is pre-eternal,” and that altogether “it is basically inconceivable for a temporal being to proceed from the eternal without mediation”; whereas Aquinas is dealing with a dual proposition “the possibility” of an eternally created world and the “actuality” of an eternally created world, two totally different propositions. Whether something “is” will demand an answer that is more restricted than the question of whether something is possible. When Aquinas does state his position on whether the world is or is not eternally created, his type of argumentation will begin to parallel Ghazali in the way of dismantling the proofs of the philosophers and demonstrating their incoherence. Aquinas writes on this matter:

We must investigate, therefore, whether these two concepts are logically incompatible namely, that a thing has been created by God and yet has existed forever. Whatever may be the truth of the matter, no heresy is involved in the contention that God is able to bring it about that something created by Him should always have

16 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Christian Classics, 1948), 1, q. 46, arts. 1–2.

17 For a deeper analysis of the “possibility” of an eternal world and Aquinas’s defense of this proposition see John F. Wippel’s “Did Thomas Aquinas Defend the Possibility of an Eternally Created World?” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1981): 21–37.

existed. Nevertheless, I believe that, if the concepts were to be found incompatible, this position would be false. However, if there is no contradiction in the concepts, not only is it not false, but it is even possible; to maintain anything else would be erroneous. Since God's omnipotence surpasses all understanding and power, anyone who asserts that something which is intelligible among creatures cannot be made by God, openly disparages God's omnipotence.¹⁸

In this passage, Aquinas is admitting the "possibility" of an eternal world only out of reverence for divine omnipotence, the rules of logic, and the understanding that possibilities should be understood as non-existence with a potential for existence given God's freewill and creative powers to endow existence upon that which is possible.

Interestingly, although Ghazali in his *Tahāfut* does not engage in the possibility of an eternally created world in any of his arguments as Aquinas does, in his other writings we can find reference to the same line of argumentation on possibilities and God's creative action. This makes an intriguing point of posthumous discussion between Aquinas and Ghazali; where perhaps if Aquinas discusses with Ghazali the "possibility of a created world" perhaps we may find that Ghazali would agree to the truth of Aquinas's argument in the possible. Richard Frank discusses Ghazali's *Maqṣad* on God's attribute of *al-Haqq*, the Truth or the Real. Frank highlights Ghazali's statement about existence, possible existence, and impossible existence and links that to God's creative action. Frank writes:

It would seem that for al-Ghazali, their being as possibles is absolute; they are somehow eternally already and always there for God in their own givenness, not apart from Him, but in a sense, nonetheless, independently of Him. God's being is not absolutely prior to the possible as such, but only to the actual existence of the contingent entities He causes to come to be in the world. That is to say, the possibles as essences or quiddities instantiations of which can come to exist in the world, do not originate in God but are eternally there as givens for God's knowledge. For al-Ghazali, thus God may not, strictly speaking, be said to create *ex nihilo* but rather *ex possibili*. He causes the existence of particular instances of essences that are in themselves already there "in possibility."¹⁹

18 Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 19.

19 Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazali and Avicenna*, 63.

Frank writes elsewhere:

In *Maqṣad*, al Ghazali says that the essential characteristic of God is that ‘He is the existent whose existence is necessary in itself and from which exists everything whose existence is in possibility ... He does not, that is, say anything here that would directly state or imply that God, of His very nature, must create either this world or anything at all. Elsewhere he strenuously rejects the proposition that creation takes place as a direct and inevitable consequence of God’s being.’²⁰

The passage which Frank is referring to is found in the *Maqṣad*, where Ghazali writes:

Al-Haqq—the Truth—is the one who is the antithesis of falsehood, as things may become evident by their opposites. Now everything of which one is aware may be absolutely false, absolutely true, or true in one respect and false in another. Whatever is impossible in itself is absolutely false, while that which is necessary in itself is absolutely true, and whatever is possible in itself and necessary by another is true in one respect and false in another. For this last has no existence in itself and so is false, yet acquires existence from the side of what is other than it, so it is an existence in this respect that acquired existence is bestowed upon it—so in that respect it is true while from the side of itself it is false.²¹

In terms of the possible in Ghazali’s writings on truth, although not directly related to the arguments of an eternally created world, looking closely at Ghazali’s writings that Frank highlights, one can see his line of reasoning on possibilities being true so long as they come into being through God’s creative action and will; otherwise, they are false. Although Frank’s discussion is on a far greater subject, we can still pick up on this point from his writings and draw a connection to Aquinas’s first proposition above on the possibility of an eternally created world.

Frank Griffel’s work, *Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*, is another source where we can gain insight into Ghazali’s reasoning on the actual and the possible.²² Griffel analysis Ghazali’s writings in the Seventeenth Discussion of

20 Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazali and Avicenna*, 68–69.

21 Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali: The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God, al-Maṣṣad al-asna fi sharh asma’ Allah al-husna*, trans. David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (The Islamic Texts Society, 2007), 124.

22 Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* and highlights important aspects of how Ghazali understands possible propositions in relation to God and his creative activity. In his analysis of Ghazali's response to causality we can gain insight into how Ghazali might agree with Aquinas on the possibility of an eternally created world. However, in doing so, I will not address Ghazali's specific critiques of the *falāsifa* on this issue. Instead, the focus of this article is to clarify how Ghazali understands God's relation to actuality and possibility.

Griffel highlights one of the arguments that Ghazali makes when the *falāsifa* argue against occasionalism, that if causality was not necessary to the effect, then anything could be possible. Since effects in occasionalist thought do not necessarily rely on cause, then such possibilities can include examples like, "If someone leaves a book in the house, let him allow as possible its change on his returning home ... into an animal, changing into a dog"²³ Without getting into the argument on causality, let us look at what Ghazali says in relation to the possible and God's power. "What is not impossible is within [divine] power."²⁴ Hence for us it is important to see what Ghazali considers as impossible. He states:

The impossible is not within the power [of being enacted]. The impossible consists in affirming a thing conjointly with denying it, affirming the more specific while denying the more general, or affirming two things while negating one [of them]. What does not reduce to this is not impossible, and what is not impossible is within [divine] power.²⁵

In this statement we can see Ghazali upholding the rule of contradiction to render a thing impossible. Likewise, we saw that Aquinas in the statement above also upholds the rule of contradiction as that which renders a thing impossible. Aquinas wrote, "However, if there is no contradiction in the concepts, not only is it not false, but it is even possible; to maintain anything else would be erroneous. Since God's omnipotence surpasses all understanding and power, anyone who asserts that something which is intelligible among creatures cannot be made by God, openly disparages God's omnipotence."²⁶ Hence, both Ghazali and Aquinas are asserting the intelligible to be a marker of possibility. This again may be another place where we can build a posthumous dialogue between Ghazali and Aquinas on the possibility of an eternally created world and their reverence maintaining

23 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 170.

24 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 175.

25 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 175.

26 Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 19.

the omnipotent power of God. Given all of this, it is important to recognize that, in upholding God's omnipotence, neither thinker would accept the actual existence of an eternally created world, as such a view would contradict their respective theological commitments.

For these theological thinkers, the possibility of an eternally created world would be upheld only in the mind. Griffel highlights this point from Ghazali,

Possibility does not exist in the outside world; rather, it is merely a judgement of the mind: The possibility which they mention reverts to a judgement of the mind. Anything whose existence the mind supposes, [nothing] preventing its supposing it possible, we call "possible," and if it is prevented, we call it "impossible." If [the mind] is unable to suppose its nonexistence, we name it "necessary." For these are rational propositions that do not require an existent so as to be rendered a description thereof.²⁷

In the forthcoming arguments against an eternally created world it becomes necessary for us to examine these arguments through the lens of the dual proposition and how in one respect it can be true but, in another respect, it can be false as Ghazali states in his description of *al-Haqq*, the Truth. For Ghazali and Aquinas, the possibilities will have some truth as long as they fall under the rules of logic; however, such possibilities themselves need God's creative action to become true in existence, otherwise they remain rational propositions. This realization may lead us to a rich posthumous dialogue between Ghazali and Aquinas where one can fathom that both would agree on the same proposition of the possibility of an eternally created world made by Aquinas despite the absence of this direct proposition in Ghazali's *Tahāfut*.

The Argument

Apart from directly contradicting Church authority and the Ash'arite theological position, the proposition of an eternal world would place upon God limits that were unacceptable to both Ghazali and Aquinas. The proposition assumes an eternal world by a necessary causality rather than the free will of God's creative action. This differs from the argument for a *possible* eternal world created by God's free will, which I explored in the posthumous dialogue concerning the relationship between what is actual and what is

27 Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 166.

possible. Rather, for Ghazali and Aquinas, the necessary causality becomes the ultimate problem in the proposition of an eternal world where God's omnipotence and divine will is challenged. When evaluating their respective arguments, we will be able to take note of this major undercurrent that runs through both of their writings.

Like Ghazali, Aquinas maintains that God does not act by necessity. There is nothing in his nature or in anything created to force God to will anything, whether to create the world in time or to create an eternal world, by the will of God either/or is possible. "Nothing that proceeds from the will is absolutely necessary, unless the will happens to be impelled by necessity to will something," writes Aquinas.²⁸ He continues, "But God brings creatures into existence, not by any necessity of His nature, but by His will, as we have proved; nor does He necessarily will creatures to be, as was shown in Book I. Hence, it is not absolutely necessary for any creature to be, and hence, it is not necessary that creatures should always have existed."²⁹

Ghazali takes on the proofs of the philosophers for an eternally created world in the very first discussion in the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* and narrows them down. Due to the limitations of this present work, we will limit ourselves to the first proof.

Ghazali outlines the first proof of the philosophers: "It is absolutely impossible for a temporal to proceed from an eternal."³⁰ From this proposition, secondary arguments are formed. If creation was chosen at a specific time, this would constitute a change in the creator from being a willer of existence to not being a willer of existence. The next question arises, "If the world is originated through God's origination of it, why did the world come into existence now and not earlier particularly when all the states were similar?"³¹ This leads to the idea that if the world begins in time, then in God there was something absent which then became present, like the world. This for the philosophers constitutes change in the creator. Ghazali writes,

Thus, it is now ascertained through incontrovertible argument that the proceeding of the temporal from the Eternal without a change of state of affairs in the Eternal by way of power, instrument, time, purpose, [will] or nature is impossible [according to the philosophical claim]. To project a change of state in the Eternal is

28 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.31.

29 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.31.

30 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 13.

31 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 13.

impossible because the argument regarding that change that comes about is similar to the argument regarding any other change. All this is impossible. Hence, as long as the world exists and its origination in time is impossible, its past eternity stands necessarily established.³²

In his refutation, Ghazali's main goal will be to show that the above argument is not supported by reason. There is nothing for Ghazali that would force the faculty of judgment, human reason, to concede to the proposition of the philosophers. He will demonstrate this not by elevating revelation and believing in it, despite all logical contradictions, but through utilizing the principles of reason in showing how reason itself does not verify the claims that the philosophers make.

Much like Ghazali, Aquinas engages himself with the proofs of the philosophers in order to demonstrate that their proposition of a necessarily eternally created world is not a compulsory conclusion. "Since, however," writes Aquinas, "many have held that the world has been always and of necessity, and have endeavored to prove this, it remains for us to give their arguments, so as to show that they do not necessarily prove the eternity of the world."³³ Thus, Aquinas lists the many proofs that have been given by philosophers in order to prove an eternal world. Aquinas engages eighteen proofs altogether and writes his objection to each one of them to show their incoherence one by one, leading his readers to conclude that the proofs that the philosophers give for an eternally created world are not valid. Much like Ghazali, he casts doubt upon the philosophical proofs for an eternally created world while giving more credence to a temporally created world based upon divine revelation. Aquinas groups the philosophers' proofs into three main categories: arguments derived from God's standpoint, those that are derived from the point of view of creatures, and those that are derived from the manner in which things were made. He analyzes and objects to each of the eighteen proofs, each proof being short and direct.

Again, due to the limits of this paper, we will only interest ourselves with the particular arguments from Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles* that overlap the arguments we find in Ghazali's argumentation in the first proof. This will allow us the ability to create the necessary space needed for dialogue between the two theologians giving us deeper insight into their shared positions on defending God's limitless powers using human reason. We will see in our comparison that although style and method of argumentation are quite different between the two; nevertheless, essentially through their

32 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 14.

33 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.32.

arguments against an eternally created world, Ghazali and Aquinas in their posthumous dialogue can be considered defenders of the faith, whether Muslim or Christian. There is essentially one main argument that both theologians aim to dismantle and that is: “From the eternal, only an eternal can proceed.” Our main concern with the proofs for an eternal world, and how Ghazali and Aquinas worked in refuting it, will revolve around the energy they put forth in refuting this particular supporting argument.

Ghazali’s Rebuttal of “From the Eternal, Only an Eternal Can Proceed”

Ghazali begins his rebuttal on the proposition of “from the eternal, only an eternal can proceed” by problematizing the proposition itself with a demand for proof. “Do you know the impossibility of an eternal will related to the temporal creation of something, whatever that thing is, through the necessity of reason or its theoretical reflection?”³⁴ What connection do the philosophers have between the eternal and the temporal? What makes the philosophers’ proposition valid, while invalidating the proposition of others who also do not defy reason, claiming that from the eternal, a temporal proceeds? Ghazali claims that their statements only express an unlikelihood, drawing an analogy with our resolve and will, which for him is false because the eternal will does not resemble temporal human intentions. In the same way that the philosophers impose the concept of rational necessity, a rational decision that is imposed upon oneself like the impositions of hunger and thirst, Ghazali turns the table and invokes upon the philosophers the argument of rational necessity using the propositions that the philosophers hold. In this way he is using the instrument of rational necessity that philosophers used for their own interests and points it right back at them. The following passage from the *Tahāfut* will illustrate Ghazali’s method in frustrating the arguments made by the philosophers:

With what argument would you deny your opponents inasmuch as they have said the following? ‘The world’s past eternity is impossible because it leads to affirming circular movements of the heavenly sphere whose number is infinite and whose individual units are innumerable, even though they divide into a sixth, a fourth, a half and so on ... Indeed, how are you to answer if one were to say, ‘Is the number of the rotations even or odd, both even and odd, or neither even nor odd?’ Should you answer either that the number is

34 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 17.

both even and odd or that it is neither even nor odd, then again this would be something whose falsity is known through rational necessity. If you were to say that the number is even, and the even becomes odd by the addition of one, then how can the infinite be in need of one? If, on the other hand, you answer that it is odd, then how would the infinite be in need of that one which would render it even? You are then necessarily forced to uphold the statement that it is neither even nor odd.³⁵

Ghazali continues along with answers that Avicenna and the philosophers would come up with in order to free themselves from the corner that he forced them into by his rebuttal questions, setting up the stage for a greater attack: “If it is said,” writes Ghazali, “It is only the finite that is described as either even or odd, but the infinite is not so described.”³⁶ Ghazali responds with another scenario, “the souls of humans, which the philosophers claim to be individuated and numerical infinities. Number divides into the even and the odd, and it is impossible for it to lie outside this division, regardless of whether or not what is enumerated exists and endures or ceases to exist.”³⁷ Ghazali writes:

According to your own principles, it is not impossible that there should be existents, present here and now, which are individual entities varying in descriptions and which are infinite. These are the souls of humans that are separated from bodies after death. These, then, are existents that are not characterized as even and odd (by the philosophers). With what arguments would you deny the statement of someone who says: “The falsity of this is known through the necessity of reason in the same way you claim that the falsity of the connectedness of the eternal will with the act of temporal creation is known through the necessity of reason?”³⁸

In order to transition to the supporting arguments, Ghazali sets up other scenario responses and again corners philosophers into demonstrating the incoherence of their proofs. “What is intended by all this,” writes Ghazali, “is to show that they have not rendered their opponents unable to uphold belief in the connectedness of the eternal will with the act of temporal creation except by invoking rational necessity and that they are unable to disengage from those who in turn invoke rational necessity against them in

35 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 18–19.

36 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 19.

37 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 19.

38 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 19.

those matters opposed to their own belief. From this they have no escape.”³⁹ Thus, by rendering the claim of “rational necessity” as an invalid tool since its usage can deliver results that are absurd, Ghazali can now claim that the philosophers do not have solid proof that warrants their claim that a temporal cannot proceed from an eternal. There is nothing demonstrated through the proofs of logic that would render belief in the temporal creation of the world impossible according to the principles of reason.

Moving along in his argument, Ghazali sets up the second argument that the philosophers use to support their proposition. They ask, “How can the will choose between two similars?” “If it is said that the will specifies it,” acknowledges Ghazali from the philosophers’ argument, “then the question arises concerning the will’s act of specifying and why it specified one possible rather than another.”⁴⁰ Does specifying one thing from another specify change in God? Was it that God changed from a non-willer to a willer? If God’s will is eternal, then shouldn’t it be the case that if God did not create at one point, then at all points God would will not to create? If God willed at a later temporal moment, did God change from one who first did not will to one who willed? Such are the problems that the philosophers are pointing out.

First, Ghazali replies to this argument by affirming the Islamic position of the existence of God’s will and to define the essence of what it means to will in comparison to the essence and function of knowledge. “The world came into existence by the will of God. It came into existence whence it did, having the description with which it came to exist, and in the place in which it came to exist, through will.”⁴¹ Ghazali emphasizes that the very function of will is to differentiate a thing from its similar. Just because God chose between two similars does not mean that a change took place; it is an attribute whose function is to act in such situations. To ask why is akin to the question “why does knowledge entail as a requirement the encompassing of the object of knowledge as it is?” The obvious answer would be, as Ghazali says, “This is because ‘knowledge’ stands as an expression for an attribute that has this as a function.”⁴² A direct analogy is drawn between knowledge and will, and similarly, Ghazali says, “Will stands as an expression for an attribute whose function—nay, its essence—is to differentiate a thing from its similar.”⁴³

39 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 20.

40 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 20.

41 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 22.

42 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 22.

43 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 22.

Although Ghazali has defined the attribute of will as that which differentiates a thing from its similar, the argument does not end there. In the voice of the philosophers, Ghazali responds with the question of contradiction. To be similar means to be indiscernible, the philosophers would say, and to be discernible means that it is dissimilar. Such a function is a contradiction, for, if to be similar, it is to be indiscernible, then there is no discerning between anything and thus the function is not possible. Ghazali illustrates the philosophers' scenario:

It is inconceivable of us [according to the philosophers] that we would differentiate through will one thing from its similar. Indeed, if in front of a thirsty person there are two glasses of water that are similar in every respect in relation to his purpose of wanting to drink, it would be impossible for him to take either. Rather, he would take that which he would deem better, lighter, closer to his right side—if his habit was to move the right hand—or some such cause, whether hidden or manifest. Otherwise, differentiating something from its like is in no circumstance conceivable.⁴⁴

Ghazali initially responds with a theological argument that the philosophers cannot say that God's will is like the will of humans since there is no correlation between the divine and the human. This ultimately rests upon the belief in revelation that nothing is like unto him. "Your using our will as an example constitutes a false analogy that parallels the analogy between human and divine knowledge. God's knowledge differs from human knowledge in matters we have already established. Why then should the difference between the divine and the human in the case of the will be unlikely?"⁴⁵ He goes on to explain that the word "will" is conventionally used in language to designate that which has an objective fulfilling a need. Clearly, God has no need, and the word "will" is used in this sense only for creatures, not for the divine. In the case of the divine, the word "will" has also been used, but it is meant to designate the attribute of God whose function is to differentiate a thing from its similar. Hence, what is being said of God and said of humans are two different things. Ghazali opens up the option of choosing a different word in order to grasp the attribute whose function is to differentiate a thing from its similar. "If the term "will" does not correspond to this attribute, then let it be given another name; for there need be no dispute about names."⁴⁶

44 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 23.

45 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 23.

46 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 23.

After arguing for the distinctiveness of God's attributes, Ghazali goes back to refute the philosophers' argument on their own terms. He has made his statement that we cannot correlate human attributes with divine attributes and puts it aside. His response is to engage in the argument internally, using only the philosophical tools to cast doubt upon their proofs and folly the proposition of an eternal world in a fascinating argument that does not derive from an Islamic or theological perspective. "Even so, in our own human case," he writes, "we do not concede that the choice between similar things is inconceivable."⁴⁷ Ghazali establishes a scenario that will refute the philosophers' proposition: "[D]ifferentiating something from its like is in no circumstance conceivable."⁴⁸ In this scenario, Ghazali demonstrates that there are circumstances where it is proper for the will in the human experience to differentiate between one thing and its similar.

For we will suppose that there are two equal dates in front of someone gazing longingly at them, unable however, to take both together. He will inevitably take one of them through an attribute whose function is to render a thing specific, differentiating it from its like. All the specifying things you have mentioned by way of goodness, proximity, and ease of taking we can suppose to be absent, the possibility of taking one of the two yet remaining. You are, hence, left between two alternatives. You could either say that equality in relation to the individual's purpose is utterly inconceivable, which is sheer foolishness, the supposition of this equality being possible, or else, that if the equality is supposed, the man yearning for the dates would ever remain undecided, looking at them but taking neither through pure will and choice that according to you are dissociated from the objective of taking a specific one. This also is impossible, its falsity known by rational necessity. It is, hence, inescapable for anyone engaged in theoretical reflection on the true nature of the voluntary act, whether in the realm of the observable or the unseen, but to affirm the existence of an attribute whose function is to render one thing specifically distinct from its similar.⁴⁹

The dates present themselves in front of an individual as similar in all ways. From the human perspective this constitutes a choice between two similars. What is one to do? Intellect is not required to satisfy the want of the individual. At this point, it is that attribute which has an objective fulfilling a

47 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 23.

48 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 43.

49 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 23–24.

need. The need is to satisfy one's hunger or desire for the date, and it is the will that takes the date and satisfies the hunger, obviously taking one and not the other. There is a choice between two similar dates, and the person will eventually pick one. Hence, the claim that philosophers make about differentiating a thing from its similar as inconceivable is now unwarranted. Ghazali's example renders the conceivability of how one can differentiate a thing from its similar.

The second objection that comes from Ghazali concerning the impossibility of discernment between similars gets directly into the heart of the argument made by philosophers regarding the eternity of the world. "You in your own doctrine," accuses Ghazali, "have not been able to dispense with the rendering one of two similars specifically distinct, for you hold the world to have come into being through its necessitating cause, having specific configurations similar to their opposites."⁵⁰ The philosophers claim that by the necessitating causal relations the world came into existence with particular configurations, those configurations were selected among other similar configurations. Ghazali questions why the philosophers allow the specification between similars that follow naturally, yet don't allow the specification between similars through the voluntary act of the divine will. At this point, Ghazali strikes the philosophers with the aim of his rebuttal, "We will force on you, in terms of your own principles, the admission of rendering specific one similar as distinct from another in two instances where it is not possible to suppose a difference between their similar. One is the difference of direction of the world's motion; the other is the assignment of the position of the pole in the ecliptic movement."⁵¹ Both instances are admitted by the philosophers and admitting either of the two cases necessarily forces the philosophers to admit the possibility and necessity of specifying one thing from its similar. Again, in this second argument, Ghazali will work within the principles of the philosophers and on their own grounds to refute their particular proofs and to create doubt in their greater proposition of an eternally created world by switching to the concept of creation in space in order to justify the concept of creation in time.

For the sake of demonstrating the Ghazalian use of reason in refuting the arguments of the *falāsifa*, it will be sufficient to relay only one instance, "the assignment of the position of the pole in the ecliptic movement."⁵² This will give us a strong demonstration of Ghazali's style. Ghazali argues:

50 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 24.

51 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 25.

52 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 52.

Heaven is a sphere rotating around two poles as though both are stationary. Now the heavenly sphere is of similar parts. For it is simple—particularly the highest heaven, the ninth, for it has no stars at all. These two spheres, the ninth and the rest, rotate around two poles, northern and southern. Thus, we say, “There are no two opposite points among the points that, according to the philosophers, are infinite but could be conceived as being the pole. Why is it, then, that the northern and southern points have been assigned to be the poles and to be stationary? And why does not the ecliptic line shift, moving with it the two points so that the poles would revert to the two opposite points of the ecliptic? If, then, there is wisdom in the extent of the largeness of heaven and its shape, what differentiated the place of the pole from another place, singling it out to be the pole from the rest of the parts and points, when all the points are similar and all parts of the sphere are equal?” There is no way out of this for them.⁵³

If the heavens are to be spherical in shape, simple nature, similar in its parts, having no inequality, then how does one point get chosen above all else? How do the north and south positions become fixed and why do they not change? If the philosophers claim a natural inequality, then Ghazali dives right back at them with their very own doctrine of the heavens being similar and identical in all its parts, according to them there are no peculiarities. “Yet, despite the fact that they claim total equality, the question regarding that peculiarity remains. Are the rest of the parts receptive to this peculiarity or not? If they say, “Yes,” then why did this peculiarity attach specifically to one of the similars and not the rest?”⁵⁴ Ghazali intuitively understands the philosophers’ response as deeming one of the parts receptive of the pole. For him, this is not sufficient because if all the parts are similar then no one part can be receptive above another. They cannot escape from Ghazali’s interrogation. “It is thus the inescapable conclusion,” resolves Ghazali, “that assigning a particular place with a specific characteristic is either arbitrary or else realized through an attribute whose very function is to render one thing more specific than its exact similar.”⁵⁵ “If it is valid for the *ḥalāṣifa* to say that the temporal states are equal in their receptivity of the world’s occurrence, it is valid for their opponents to say that the parts of heaven are equal in terms of receptivity of the idea due to which precedence is given to the fixity of one position for the pole as against its replacement.”⁵⁶ Again, Ghazali closes

53 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 25.

54 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 26.

55 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 26.

56 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 26.

his dramatic argument with the words, “From this there is no escape!”⁵⁷ As is characteristic of his work, Ghazali limits his rebuttal to the techniques of the *falāsifa* and does not assume the Quranic and theological voice as a legitimate tool for persuasion and argumentation. His arguments are based on principles derived from reason, not principles derived from the Quran.

Aquinas’s Rebuttal of “From the Eternal, Only an Eternal Can Proceed”

Aquinas’s position on whether the world is an eternal creation of God was made clear numerous throughout his writings. He stood firmly with the Catholic Church and affirmed the temporal creation of the world denouncing the Aristotelian proposition that the world must have been eternal because God’s act is eternal. “We must hold firmly that the world has not always existed, as the Catholic faith teaches. And this truth cannot be effectively attacked by any demonstration based on physics.”⁵⁸ Like Ghazali, Aquinas brought forth the philosophical proofs that dominated the intellectual sphere concerning the proposition of the eternity of the world. He listed each proof and then listed his objection to each one of them, planting doubt upon the philosophers’ proofs that contradicted the revelation of the Bible. Thus, like Ghazali in support of Islamic doctrine, Aquinas strengthened the biblical and Catholic faith by demonstrating that what the philosophers, those that copied the *falsafa* tradition of Avicenna or the Aristotelian propositions, deemed to be a necessary conclusion on the eternity of the world was not necessarily so. Yes, as discussed above, Aquinas certainly did take a step further than Ghazali in affirming the “possibility” of an eternal world. However, this possibility is based solely on the will and power of God and upon his findings that the proposition was not in itself inherently contradictory. For here, we imagine a posthumous dialogue between the two theologians, resulting in a comparative theological exercise. Aquinas, like Ghazali, would never deny God the power of doing anything he so chooses, so long as no logical contradiction is imposed like in the case of God creating a rock that He can’t carry or a thing that is both even and odd. “If we inquire whether something has always existed,” deliberates Aquinas, “understanding that it was caused by God with regard to all the reality found in it, we have to examine whether such a position can be

57 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 33.

58 Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei, On the Power of God in On the Eternity of the World*, trans. Cyril Vollert, (Marquette University Press, 1964), q. 3, a. 17.

maintained. If we should decide that this is impossible, the reason will be either that God could not make a thing that has always existed, or that the thing could not thus be made, even though God were able to make it. As to the first alternative, all parties agreed that God could make something that has always existed, because of the fact that His power is infinite.”⁵⁹ Based on the will and power of God, Aquinas will make room for the possibility of an eternal world; however, none of the arguments he lists will ever achieve the glory of proving necessarily that the world is eternal; this would be in great contradiction to divine revelation of a temporally created world and an assault on the religious affirmation of the sole eternal being, God.

Aquinas’s categorizations of the arguments are quite different than Ghazali. Where Ghazali positions all the arguments under four main umbrella arguments on the eternity of the world and pieces them together almost in a dialogical format, Aquinas on the other hand, as was said earlier, lists each argument under its type and objects to each one in a very direct and succinct manner. Further, many of his objections are based upon the premise that God is all willing and all powerful. Yet, like Ghazali, Aquinas does get into the philosophers’ proofs and dismantles them within the proof itself, not premising the argument on anything other than what the argument itself entails. For the sake of the comparative element and the limits of this project, we will only concern ourselves with a handful of Aquinas’s arguments that overlap Ghazali’s.

Addressing the proposition “from the Eternal only an eternal can proceed,” Aquinas lists two proofs from the philosophers which are worded differently. The first of the proofs relates to God’s act and it being necessarily an act that must act in the same way always in order to avoid attributing contingency in God. “Every agent that is not always in action, is moved either directly or indirectly ... but God is not moved directly or indirectly ... Therefore God always acts in the same way, and it is by His action that created things are brought into being. Accordingly, creatures have always existed.”⁶⁰ From this proof, we are led to believe that it is inconceivable for something to come from God that starts anew. This would entail God being directly or indirectly moved either by something external like an event or an agent or something internal that is newly formed within God. The prior would mean that God was contingent upon an event or agent, and the later would mean that a change took place in God, either of which entail contingency in God, who is not contingent, thus a contradiction. Hence, the

59 Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 19.

60 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.32.

proof deduces that from the Eternal only an eternal can proceed through God's eternal act.

Aquinas responds to this proof by asserting the opposite of what the argument is saying. Even if the effects produced by God begin to exist anew, He Himself need not be moved either directly or indirectly. "Newness of effect can, indeed, indicate a change in the agent to the extent that it demonstrates newness of action," writes Aquinas.⁶¹ However, for Aquinas God's act is from His essence. "Newness of a divine effect does not demonstrate newness of action in God, since His action is His essence ... Newness of effort cannot demonstrate change when God is the agent."⁶² Like Ghazali's argument above, "Your using our will as an example constitutes a false analogy that parallels the analogy between human and divine knowledge," Aquinas, too, is calling out a false analogy.⁶³ God's will, according to Aquinas, is from his essence and his essence is a mystery. For St. Thomas, we cannot know anything about God's essence except what he reveals to us. Reason, whether by an analogy or by demonstrative argumentation, will never lead us to a conclusion about God's essence that we can know to be true.

The second proof is quite succinct and is listed as follows:

Again, an effect proceeds from its efficient cause by the action of that cause. But God's action is eternal; otherwise, He would become an actual agent after being a potential agent, and He would have to be actualized by some prior agent; which is impossible. Therefore, the things created by God have existed from eternity.⁶⁴

The argument is essentially declaring the same thing as the argument which Ghazali refutes that "from the Eternal, only an eternal can proceed." For if a temporal proceeds from the eternal, this would tell us that God was in a state of potentiality or contingency which is obviously contradictory to God's being. At one point, God thought of creating the world, but did not yet do so, and at another point he actually creates the world. All of this constitutes change and contingency within God; thus, the philosophers find it absurd to think God's creation as temporal. To refute this proposition, Aquinas strikes an analogical argument to give an alternative possibility, stating that it does not follow that if the action of the First agent is eternal, His effect must be

61 Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 34.

62 Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 34.

63 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 23.

64 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.32.

eternal. God's power is that which does not divide the act from the will and intellect like in the human act. "God's act of understanding and will is necessarily identical with His act of making. An effect issues from the intellect and will according to the direction of the intellect and the command of the will."⁶⁵ God's power in creating the temporal avoids potentiality because he sets a time for his creation. He not only determines the creation but also the time, he is not limited to human contingency upon successive moments. Aquinas gives a plausible example in the case of a physician: "A physician prescribes that a medicine should be given at this or that time; if his act of will were in itself powerful enough to produce the effect, the effect would follow in due time from the previous decision, without any new action on his part."⁶⁶ The statement "if his act of will were in itself powerful enough to produce the effect" forces upon the reader the existence or possibility of a power strong enough to create in future time, in a single act. If God is omnipotent, the denial of this possibility would be contradictory to the essence of omnipotence. Without resolving to revelation, Aquinas engages himself in the argument, relying only upon the principles of the argument. Aquinas invokes God's power and stresses that what creates a delay in act is the limitations set on human power; however, if these limitations were lifted away, a delay in act would not take place. Creatures are limited but no such limitations can be associated with God.

The final argument to be considered is the argument of choosing between two similars. "An intellectual agent does not choose one thing in preference to another unless the one is more excellent than the other. But where there is no difference, there cannot be any superiority in excellence. Hence, where no difference is discernible, no choice will be made of one thing rather than of another."⁶⁷ The agent will not proceed in act between two similars because there is nothing that is superior to the other that would allow the agent to differentiate and choose one over the other. This translates into the argument against a temporal creation by showing that likewise in the eternity of God, beyond the entire universe of creatures nothing in difference exists.

No difference in periods of time can be designated in nothingness. Such a difference in moments cannot be designated in eternity, the whole of which is uniform and simple ... The consequence is, therefore, that God's will is equally disposed to the production of creatures throughout all eternity. Accordingly, it is either His will

65 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.35.

66 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.35.

67 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.32.

that creatures should never be produced within His eternity, or that they should always have been produced.⁶⁸

Either God creates the world necessarily with his own being together from eternity, or God should never create. Since it is obvious that the world exists, then God created the world necessarily from eternity equal in eternality with his being. According to the philosophers, no choice for God is possible because in the eternity of God, there are no points of distinction, and it is not possible for God to differentiate between two similars. Like in the case of Ghazali, the question arises concerning the will's act of specifying, "for the proposition is that differentiating something from its like is in no circumstance conceivable."⁶⁹ Aquinas, like Ghazali, will demonstrate how this is not necessarily so. He will use the time and space to make his demonstration.

Solving this problem, Aquinas admits, like the philosophers have claimed, that there is no diversity of parts prior to the beginning of all creation. "God's duration, which is eternity, has no parts, but it is absolutely simple, without before and after, since God is immovable."⁷⁰ But for Aquinas, the admission of all parts being similar invalidates the question of why this and not that. "There is no question of comparing the beginning of all creation with diverse parts designated in some pre-existing measure, with which the beginning of creatures might be in agreement or disagreement, so that an agent would have to have a reason for bringing creatures into existence at this particular instant of that duration rather than at some preceding or subsequent instant."⁷¹ Answering the question of why this moment rather than that moment is valid only in the temporal realm where duration is divisible into parts. Aquinas now flips the argument; the question to be deliberated is not, why He produced them now rather than earlier, but only why He did not endow them with eternal existence. If God is eternal, why isn't creation eternal?

To clarify his position, Aquinas will refer to the concept of space/place as well as the concept of time. Referring to the concept of creation in space is also one of the means that Ghazali uses in his argumentation to justify creation in time. Particular bodies are created in place as well as in time. We know this because the world is situated in a definite place within eternal space. It has limitations or borders and a particular size and shape. This is

68 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.32.

69 Ghazali, *Incoherence*, 43.

70 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.35.

71 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.35.

something that we can measure and confirm through observation. Is there a reason why particular bodies, such as the earth, are produced in this place and at this time rather than another? Similar to how Ghazali engages in the argument of the two stationary poles in the heavenly sphere, Aquinas affirms that “there is no reason for inquiring why the whole of heaven was located here and not there, for beyond it there is no place, and the entire place for all things was produced along with it.”⁷² As Ghazali questions the choice of poles in a sphere of identical points, Aquinas questions the choice of the whole of heaven and its designation in particular time and space. Further, we know that it is produced in a particular place, but does that mean we have to know why it is produced in a particular place or how it was produced in a particular place, in order for us to know that it is produced in a particular place? Likewise, we know through revelation that the world was temporally created, but does that mean we have to know why and how it was temporally created? “Similarly,” writes Aquinas, “outside the totality of creation there is no time, since time was produced simultaneously with the universe; hence we need not go into the reason why it exists now and not earlier, and so we will not be led to concede the infinity of time.”⁷³ Although Ghazali and Aquinas are using somewhat different examples, their arguments remain the same. They are questioning why the philosophers who promote the inability for the creator to choose between two similars, actually does so in other aspects of the heavens, whether it is the poles of the spheres or the placing or timing of the earth and other heavenly bodies.

Conclusion

In their arguments against the proposition of an eternal world, both Ghazali and Aquinas can be seen as defending the power and will of God. For Aquinas, belief in a temporal world is based solely on faith in divine revelation. No arguments or demonstrations can be made to prove a temporal world and hence the possibility of an eternal world is always open as long as it is God’s will that chooses to create it. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, after dismantling the proofs for an eternal world, Aquinas further lists six arguments that are made in order to prove that the world is not eternal. Like in the case of the proofs for an eternal world, Aquinas dismantles these six proofs affirming that the proofs for a temporal world do not conclude with strict necessity, although they are not entirely devoid of probability.⁷⁴

72 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.35.

73 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.35.

74 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.38.

Aquinas's motive is made clear by his statement that "it is enough to touch on them briefly, so that the Catholic faith may not seem to rest on inept reasoning rather than on the unshakable basis of God's teaching."⁷⁵

In the case of Ghazali, we do not see him dismantling proofs for a temporal world and affirming that only through divine revelation can we know of a temporal world, like Aquinas. However, Ghazali dismantles the proofs of the philosophers for an eternal world and at the same time affirms his belief in the divine revelation made knowable to us through the prophets of God. His basis for a temporally created world, apart from revelation, rests largely upon his arguments against the proofs of a necessarily and eternally created world. Further, although Ghazali himself does not entertain the possibility of an eternally created world, a posthumous comparison allows us to see how, based on his description of God's divine attribute *al-Haqq* (the Truth) and his rejection of necessary causal connection, he might align with Aquinas in allowing for the *possibility* of an eternally created world based on God's will and creative action—even if he never states this explicitly in the *Tahāfut*. As stated earlier, Ghazali certainly did entertain the idea of the possible which may or may not become actual depending upon the will and creative action of God.

As a Muslim engaged in searching for areas of understanding across faith traditions, I recognize that these questions are seldom black and white. They require attentiveness to nuance. When we approach theological inquiry with this sensitivity, we may discover that traditions often stand closer to one another in their reverence for God than we initially assume—even closer than some who share the same confessional identity. This is, in many ways, the central lesson of comparative theology. And thus, we can imagine that Aquinas and Ghazali may agree on the *possibility* of an eternally created world—so long as it remains an idea entertained in the human mind—and would likewise agree in rejecting the *actuality* of such a world in order to uphold their respective religious doctrines. For both, nothing is impossible for God: If He wills a thing, it is. *Deo Volente—Insha'Allah—God willing*.

Sana Tayyen is Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Redlands in Southern California. She received her PhD from Claremont Graduate University in Philosophy of Religion and Theology and an MA in Philosophy. Her research and teaching include interreligious studies, religion and global leadership, Muslim women, and classical and contemporary Islam. Since beginning her graduate studies, Dr. Tayyen has dedicated

75 Aquinas, *SCG*, II.38.

her research, teaching, and travels to understanding global interreligious dynamics and histories.

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ARTICLE

The Logistics of Faith and Reason in Anselm and Ādi Śaṅkara: A Hindu-Christian Comparative Theological Inquiry

Pravina Rodrigues

Abstract

This paper examines the role of faith and reason in the works of St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), an 11th-century Benedictine monk, Archbishop, philosopher, and theologian and Ādi Śaṅkara, an eminent 8th-century CE pedagogue and systematic theologian in the Hindu world. As such, it seeks to uncover and define the contours of Hindu-Christian studies in terms of its *raison d'être* for engagement, which consequently effects its *modus operandi*. Understanding the role of faith and reason enables us to see how the academic study of comparative theology (CT) and interreligious dialogue (IRD) proceeds compared to Hindu theological inquiries. In this paper, first, I examine the definition of “faith seeking understanding” in the works of St. Anselm. Then, I explore the understanding of faith and reason in the writings of Ādi Śaṅkara. Their perspectives have significant implications for CT and IRD, as Anselm’s framework emphasizes rationality apart from scriptures, is theistic and dualistic, whereas Śaṅkara’s non-dual understanding of faith and reason challenges Western theological assumptions of faith and knowledge by cultivating an attitude of receptivity. Engaging Śaṅkara’s paradigm offers an alternate universal epistemological model, enriching Hindu-Christian dialogue by transcending doctrinal assent to a transformative, experiential, understanding of liberation.

Keywords

St. Anselm of Canterbury, Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara, faith seeking understanding, faith and reason, *fides quaerens intellectum*, śraddhā, pramāṇa, comparative theology, interreligious dialogue, interfaith dialogue

Introduction

The discipline of comparative theology (henceforth CT), alongside its related fields such as theology of religions (TOR) and interreligious dialogue (IRD), has become widely prominent in contemporary academic discourse, attracting scholars from Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and other religious traditions. Despite its growing appeal, the discipline's Christian roots remain evident, alongside unresolved ambiguities in demarcating confessional theology from religious studies, as well as ongoing critical reflection on its theological underpinnings, and its methodological foundations. Central to these concerns is the articulation of the discipline's *raison d'être* in engaging the religious Other, a foundational question which shapes its *modus operandi* and scholarly practices.

Francis X. Clooney, the father of comparative theology, answers this foundational question by arguing for theology as an “interreligious, comparative, dialogical, and confessional enterprise.”¹ Clooney's approach in comparative theology involves a method that combines elements of confession, interreligious engagements, comparison, and dialogics.² His method involves comparing and contrasting “texts, images, practices, doctrines, and individuals” from two or more religious traditions.³ The ultimate aim is to assist interlocutors in understanding their faith regarding the various religious traditions in diverse contexts. The fruits, or insights, derived from such a comparison are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition. As per this definition, interlocutors and comparativists are not compelled to give up their faith or assimilate into the other; rather, “faith” serves as a platform to engage with individuals of

1 Francis X. Clooney, S.J., *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 7.

2 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 7–12.

3 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 7–12.

different faiths. Comparative engagements provide an opportunity to rethink and reshape one's worldview. It is a pragmatic approach to religious diversity, where we examine the world through the lens of our faith and remain open to reinterpreting and understanding the truths of our religion in light of another.⁴ CT is an intentional and focused study that pays careful attention to the specific characteristics of different traditions as they are brought together and analyzed with respect and patience, offering significant benefits to all parties.⁵

Further, Clooney makes a distinction between CT, TOR, IRD, and dialogical theology, while defining the discipline of CT as:

comparative and theological beginning to end-marks acts of *faith seeking understanding* which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, *venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions*. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition.⁶

Given the emphasis of “faith seeking understanding” on the comparative theological enterprise, this paper examines the role of faith and reason in the works of St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), an 11th-century Benedictine monk, Archbishop, philosopher, and theologian and Ādi Śaṅkara, an eminent 8th-century CE pedagogue and systematic theologian in the Hindu world. As such, it seeks to uncover and define the contours of Hindu-Christian studies in terms of its purpose for engagement, which consequently effects its *modus operandi*. Understanding the role of faith and reason enables us to see how the academic study of CT and dialogue IRD proceeds compared to Hindu theological inquiries.

First, I examine the definition of “faith seeking understanding” in the works of St. Anselm. Then, I explore the understanding of faith and reason in the writings of Ādi Śaṅkara. Their perspectives have significant implications for CT and IRD, as Anselm's framework emphasizes rationality apart from scriptures, is theistic and dualistic, whereas Śaṅkara's non-dual understanding of faith and reason challenges Western theological assumptions of faith and knowledge. Engaging Śaṅkara's paradigm offers an alternate universal epistemological model, enriching Hindu-Christian

4 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 69.

5 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 69.

6 Francis X. Clooney, S.J., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10–11, emphasis mine.

dialogue by transcending doctrinal assent to a transformative, experiential, understanding of liberation that cultivates an attitude of receptivity.

Part I: “Faith seeking Understanding”

St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), an 11th-century Benedictine monk, Archbishop, philosopher, and theologian is renowned for his ontological argument and is widely recognized as the “Father of Scholasticism.”⁷ It was Anselm who popularized the phrase “faith seeking understanding” (Latin, *fides quaerens intellectum*). While he is widely recognized for this saying, Anselm borrows the concept of “faith seeking understanding” from Augustine of Hippo (354–430). However, Anselm’s understanding of the term differs from that of Augustine. In Augustine’s viewpoint, the relationship between faith and understanding is rooted in the Bible, specifically in the book of Isaiah 7:9, which states, “Unless you believe, you will not understand.” He acknowledged that faith is a prerequisite for theological comprehension.⁸ For Augustine, faith meant a dialectical assenting relationship to Christian doctrine revealed *by and within* the Church. He described faith as agreeing with the Church and its pronouncements, as conveyed by the apostles through the canonical Scriptural texts, creedal statements, and the content of Christian revelation.⁹ Anselm is renowned for expanding upon this previous formulation by creating a framework for theological engagement that continues to be utilized in various disciplines even today, including CT and IRD.¹⁰ Anselm builds upon Augustine’s initial concept to elaborate and analyze the interplay of faith and understanding. In contrast to Augustine, who prioritizes the Scriptures and the traditional authority of the Church, Anselm’s approach diverges by placing greater importance on independent

7 Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, eds. *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford University Press, 1998), xii.

8 Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004)

9 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Fortress Press, 2011), 11–13.

10 Schüssler Fiorenza and Galvin, *Systematic Theology*, 11–13.

reasoning “apart from Scriptures,” as noted below. In *On the Incarnation of the World*, he writes:

And perhaps some will deign to read two short works of mine, namely, the *Monologion* [M] and the *Proslogion* [P]. I composed these works especially to show that compelling arguments apart from the authority of Scripture can establish things that we by faith hold about the divine nature and the divine persons besides the incarnation.¹¹

Anselm’s *Monologion* (M) serves as the starting point for rational inquiry into the significance of the Divine Essence and the Trinity, which was composed after years of teaching and deliberating on these matters with his pupil monks at Bec.¹² Toivo J. Holopainen agrees with Gene Fendt that the purpose of the *Monologion* (M) and the *Proslogion* (P) treatises is to prove through reason the substance of faith.¹³ This is understandable, given that Anselm’s primary goal as monk and abbot of Bec in Normandy was to provide the community with rigorous spiritual and intellectual formation, a commitment clearly demonstrated in his major works.¹⁴ Although most scholars agree that Anselm employs argumentation as a theological tool in his M and P, it is worth mentioning that he also makes good use of devotion and contemplation—influenced by the tradition of *Lectio Divina*—in his works via meditations and prayers.¹⁵ Building on Gene Fendt, Holopainen contends that the two works have a “common objective and a common methodology” of “argument and devotion.”¹⁶ Anselm points to this approach in his preface, describing the M as a “soliloquy” that explores “what he [the devotee] does not yet know” through quiet argumentation and the P as an *allocutio* that was written, “to elevate one’s mind toward contemplating God and seeking to understand what he believes.”¹⁷

We also see a continuity between Anselm’s concept of faith and Augustine’s understanding of assent to what the apostolic Church considers

11 *On the Origin of the World*, 6 in Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 246.

12 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, x.

13 Toivo J. Holopainen, “The *Proslogion* in Relation to the *Monologion*,” *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 4 (July 2009): 590–602.

14 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, vii.

15 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, xxi–xiv.

16 Holopainen, *The Proslogion in Relation to the Monologion*, 591.

17 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 83.

sacred regarding revelation and Scripture.¹⁸ This is reflected in Anselm's theologizing, as we can see in the quote below:

- 75. One must have hope in the supreme essence
- 76. One must believe in the supreme essence
- 77. One must have faith in Father, in Son and in their Spirit,
equally in each individual and in all three together
- 78. Dead faith and live faith.¹⁹

Like Augustine, Anselm considers faith a prerequisite for any theological endeavor while emphasizing the need for rational inquiry apart from the Scriptures. The Christian faith is neither inherently antithetical to tradition nor does it conflict with it. Additionally, I observe that Anselm does not provide a precise definition of faith in his writings. I suggest that this may be because he considers faith a foundational element of the Christian framework—an accepted starting point for contemplation without needing to be debated or analyzed. For example, he writes:

Indeed, no Christian ought to argue how things that the Catholic Church sincerely believes and verbally professes are not so, but by always adhering to the same faith without hesitation, by loving it, and by humbly living according to it, a Christian ought to argue how they are, inasmuch as one can look for reasons. If one can understand, one should thank God; if one cannot, one should bow one's head in veneration rather than sound off trumpets.²⁰

My examination of Anselm's corpus of works indicates that his writings consistently reflect a Christian worldview and an unwavering commitment to the Church's orthodoxy. In fact, the purpose of writing *On the Incarnation of the Word* was to defend himself against Roscelin's unorthodox interpretations of the Trinity—an interpretation Roscelin claimed to derive from Anselm's own teachings.²¹ An unmistakable Christian theme runs through Anselm's works, which can be discerned from both their titles and from the central arguments they advance. Works such as *On Truth*, *Free Will*, *On the Fall of the Devil*, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, *Why God Became Man*, *On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, and *De Concordia* (*The Compatibility of God's Foreknowledge, Predestination, and Grace with Human*

18 Fiorenza and Galvin, *Systematic Theology*, 13.

19 M: 75–78 in Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 10.

20 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 235.

21 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, viii.

Freedom) exemplify this orientation. Though he was intrigued by the “nature and working of language,” even his *De Grammatico* (*Dialogue on Literacy and the Literate*) is not about grammar or logic *per se* but about how semantical structures relate to the “persons of the Trinity” in terms of substance.²²

Anselm’s starting point in analyzing the content of Christian revelation and dogmatic truths is faith rather than doubt or a hermeneutic of suspicion. His step-by-step methodical technique uses dialogue to arrive at certain conclusions while never letting go of one’s devotional mood throughout the process. Within this schema, faith is indispensable. “For a Christian ought to progress through faith to understanding, not reach faith through understanding—or, if he cannot understand, leave faith behind. Now, if he can achieve understanding, he rejoices; but if he cannot, he stands in awe of what he cannot grasp.”²³ Faith then is the substratum, as it were, for theologizing for Anselm as he confessed in his P1, “For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that ‘unless I believe, I shall not understand’ [Isaiah 7: 9].”²⁴ In my reading, faith, generates a feedback loop that impacts the interlocutor and is deemed active faith if it is based on love that yields good works.²⁵ Furthermore, according to Anselm, faith is a “spiritual discipline” characterized by an “obedient will” rather than just an “epistemic attitude.”²⁶ Faith as a spiritual discipline involves contemplating the Scriptures and humbly adhering to the Lord’s commandments and testimonies found in the Scriptures.²⁷ Faith produces wisdom, purifies the heart, and, in turn, leads one to the experiential knowledge of the truths of “doctrine.”²⁸ Anselm writes:

[T]hose who have not believed will not understand. For those who have not believed will not find by experience, and those who have not found by experience will not know. For example, the more experience transcends hearing about things, the more the knowledge of those experiencing things surpasses the knowledge of those hearing about them.²⁹

22 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, xiv, xv, 435.

23 Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm: Great Medieval Thinkers* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 20.

24 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 87.

25 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 79.

26 Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 20.

27 Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 20.

28 Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 20.

29 Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 236–237.

Anselm employs metaphors of “spiritual wings” and a “ladder” to describe those who attempt to advance intellectually without the aid of faith and their subsequent failure. According to Anselm, faith is not vacuous or meaningless but serves as a protective shield, safeguarding from mistakes and enhancing one’s capacity for logical understanding. He writes:

And not only is the mind without faith and obedience to the commandments of God prevented from rising to understand higher things, but the mind’s endowed understanding is also sometimes taken away, and faith itself subverted, when upright conscience is neglected.³⁰

I began to wonder if perhaps it might be possible to find one single argument that for its proof required no other save itself, and that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists, that He is the supreme good needing no other and is He whom all things have need of for their being and well-being, and also to prove whatever we believe about the Divine Being.³¹

In the M, Anselm examines the concepts that, by pure reasoning alone, may guide one to the Trinity. The content of this work is heavily influenced by Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*), in which Anselm incorporates several “psychological” concepts such as “memory, will, understanding, mind, knowledge, and love.”³² In contrast to dialogues in catechism, which are predetermined, structured responses, Anselm’s dialogues are more akin to the Socratic dialogue style employed by Plato, characterized by genuine discourse. Students and teachers collaboratively deduce that truth, which can manifest in acts and declarations, pertains to things being in accordance with how they should be.³³ Yet, it is essential to note that Augustine, rather than Plato, serves as Anselm’s primary inspiration.³⁴

I argue that the methodological freedom exhibited in Anselm’s model represents a remarkable step towards the utility of reason and rational philosophy to answer theological questions, even if it remains constrained by Christian presuppositions. It should be noted that Anselm has faced criticism for attempting to supplant faith with reason. However, I contend that his

30 Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 237.

31 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 82.

32 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, xi.

33 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, xv. Works such as “On Truth,” “Free Will,” “On the Fall of the Devil,” and “*De Grammatico*,” are presented as dialogues between a student and a teacher.

34 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, xv.

aim is not to substitute faith with reason but to intellectually analyze the Christian faith. I emphasize that he persists in this endeavor despite opponents who consider faith to be incompatible with reason. “The first book contains the objections of unbelievers who reject the Christian faith because they think it militates against reason, and the answers given by the faithful.”³⁵ Thus, Anselm seeks to reconcile faith and reason by presenting arguments raised by nonbelievers who refuse to accept the Christian faith for various reasons. I further observe that, despite his strong emphasis on rational inquiry, Anselm does not provide an explicit definition of reason, leaving it as an operative principle within his theological method.

John F. Rico notes that Anselm does not define “*fides ratio*” (faith reason) because it is not a “term that forms a link in his chains of argumentation, but rather names the very principle by which those chains are made and given structure. It is left to Anselm’s readers to express what that principle is and to succeed in rightly expressing it surely requires thinking [in terms of defining] as Anselm did.”³⁶ To understand the term “*fides ratio*,” Rico turns to Augustine who has influenced Anselm the most. He notes how in Augustine’s work, *ratio* is understood as “a movement of the mind, capable of distinguishing and connecting those things which are learned.”³⁷ *Ratio* is not “static” but “dynamic” and through its “dynamism the mind ‘distinguishes and connects what it learns.’”³⁸ Rico further notes that Augustine defines *fides*, a noun as if it were a verb as “to believe what you do not see” (*quod non vides credere*). Furthermore, he asserts that the act of believing (*credere*) might be understood as nothing more than “thinking with assent” (*cum assensione cogitare*).³⁹ Thinking is crucial to faith; therefore, faith is inherently a cognitive process, an act of thinking. From an Augustinian perspective, faith may be defined as “thinking with assent what is not seen.” So, instead of stating that Anselm holds a perspective on the connection between faith and reason, it is more accurate to state that he holds a perspective on “the rationale behind faith.”

The “rational basis of faith” suggests something external: arguments in support of doctrinal formulations that have an apologetic or protreptic purpose. “The logic of faith” suggests something internal: the rational coherence of the doctrines of faith, the way they “all hang together” logically. Anselm’s *ratio fidei* means both these things

35 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 261.

36 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 77.

37 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 78.

38 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 78.

39 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 78.

at once; it refers to the intrinsically rational character of Christian doctrines in virtue of which they form a coherent and rationally defensible system.⁴⁰

This means that “reason has role to play *prior to faith* and *within* the realm of faith and that *faith transcends reason*.”⁴¹ There is a “proper ordering” in the “rational dynamic” of faith seeking understanding so that if one operates contrary to this order, then no progress is made in understanding, and errors occur.⁴² “There is no room for doubt about what I say: One who has not believed will not understand. For one who has not believed will not experience, and one who has not experienced will not know.”⁴³ Rico finds additional components in the role of reason and faith that may appear discordant at first glance, but they make sense in light of Anselm’s Benedictine monastic context.⁴⁴ Rico names these elements as:

[T]he intellectual communality inherent in Anselm’s example of meditating, the concomitance of prayer and philosophy in the dynamic of faith seeking understanding, the proper ordering of that dynamic, the beauty of reasoning, the obligation to seek understanding, fraternal concern with carrying out that obligation in the properly ordered way.⁴⁵

In the pattern exemplified in the M, Rico notes the first additional element as “intellectual communality.” The M is *An Example of Meditating on the Reason of Faith* and the example is meant to be shared with other Benedictine confreres attesting to its communal dimension.⁴⁶ Although the reflection on dogmatic truths is done apart from Scriptures, the “necessity of reason” and the “clarity of truth” “can be shared, for they are the common property of all.”⁴⁷ The communal relationships between “teacher and student, between author and reader, between Anselm and his brother monks” are supported by “plain style, unsophisticated arguments, and straightforward disputation.”⁴⁸

The second element is the simultaneous occurrence of prayer and philosophy within the dynamic of faith seeking understanding. Rico notes

40 Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 13–14.

41 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 79, emphasis mine.

42 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 84.

43 Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury*, 46.

44 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 81.

45 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 86.

46 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 80.

47 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 87.

48 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 81.

that the telos of the seeker is the “seeing” “not of the bodily eye, but of the soul; it is the immediate beholding of the divine.”⁴⁹ This goal is met through a life of active prayer that operates on the basic principle of love, constantly longing, seeking, and desiring God. It is not a sterile seeking but fecund in its desire to know its beloved, the object and subject of one’s love.

The third element in Anselm’s dynamic of faith seeking understanding has to do with proper order. Faith orders understanding, understanding shapes experience, and experience leads to knowing. Faith precedes understanding while leading the seeker through longing and love to analyze faith, and finally faith transcends reason.

The fourth aspect has to do with beauty and its relationship to reason. Anselm says the solution to the dialogue’s central topic is attractive and compelling because of the “beauty of its *reasoning*.”⁵⁰ In another context, Anselm objects to Boso’s request, stating that the “subject matter is not merely precious but ... beautiful in its reasoning beyond the understanding of men.”⁵¹ Anselm’s method of faith seeking understanding is elegant and alluring due to its aesthetics of rationality that surpass human comprehension. Applying logic and rationality not only resolves disagreements but also possesses a profound beauty, a quality inherent in the thinking process.

The fifth element is the obligation to share with the community the necessity of reason and the importance of maintaining the right order in the seeking process. Faith’s reason involves all these things: a duty, or obligation, to seek understanding; a fitting ordering of that understanding to faith and seeing; and a beauty that goes beyond human comprehension. All of this needs to be done while respecting individual freedom.⁵²

Finally, the sixth element pertains to genuine fraternal concern. Anselm cautions that those who fail to fulfill their obligation of performing faith seeking understanding in a proper order end up erring and failing to ascend through the intellect. The dynamic in the ordering is both constructive and destructive.⁵³ It is important to note that Anselm fully understood the limitations of logic and its inability to fully penetrate the mystery of God.

49 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 83.

50 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 85; Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo (CDH)*, I:1, in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, ed. Davies and Evans, 245.

51 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 85; Anselm, *CDH* I:1, in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, ed. Davies and Evans, 245.

52 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 88.

53 Rico, *The Reason of Faith*, 86.

According to him, logic may provide support and justify “necessary reasons” that facilitate comprehension of the existence of God, the incarnation, and other related truths.⁵⁴

Part II: Desire, Faith, Reason, and Knowledge in the Works of Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara

The opening verse of the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, or *A Thousand Teachings* ascribed to Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara, an eminent 8th-century CE pedagogue and systematic theologian renowned for his scholarly accomplishments and exegetical writings, commences with the verse “We shall now explain a method of teaching the means to liberation for the benefit of those aspirants after liberation who are desirous (of this teaching) and are possessed of faith (in it).”⁵⁵ Before elucidating the pedagogical approach to impart the knowledge and techniques necessary for attaining liberation (*mokṣa*), Ādi Śaṅkara (henceforth Śaṅkara) clearly notes that this instruction is not intended for random persons but for those individuals who “desire” liberation and have “faith” in the teachings. What does Śaṅkara mean by those “desirous of this teaching” and possessing of “faith in it”?

Desire in the context of Śaṅkara’s teachings is a dual-edged phenomenon that operates in two areas. On the one hand, it is the desire for liberation (*mokṣa*); on the other, it is the renunciation of sensory, material, and worldly desires. “*Mumukṣutva* or yearning for freedom is the desire to free oneself, by realizing one’s true nature, from all bondages from that of egoism to that of the body—bondages superimposed by Ignorance” (VC 27).⁵⁶ The intense longing for freedom from the superimposition of ignorance (*avidyā*) and the constraints of the ego combined with the awareness that the temporal is “evanescent,” bringing about pain and suffering, becomes a motivational fire on the path to liberation (US 52).⁵⁷ While positive desire means a craving for release from ignorance and knowing one’s true nature as *sat-cit-ānanda* (being-consciousness-infinite), negatively, it means abandoning

54 Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Random House, 1955), 130.

55 Swāmi Jagadānanda, *Upadeśasāhasrī Gadyapadyabhāgadavayam: A Thousand Teachings in Two Parts, Prose and Poetry of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, translated into English with Explanatory Notes* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1949), 2.

56 VC refers to *Vivekachudamani*. See, Swami Madhavananda, *Vivekachudamani of Śrī Shankaracharya: Text with English Translation, Notes and an Index* (Prabuddha Bharat Press, 1921), 11.

57 US refers to *Upadeśasāhasrī*, See, Jagadānanda, *Upadeśasāhasrī*, 207.

the world and all it has to offer—the desire for temporary goods, children, wealth, the precise techniques of achieving goals in life, and even the desire for the next world, the heavens (US 1.2).⁵⁸ Such aspirants have developed a form of “indifference” (*vairāgya*) which should not be confused with nihilism, having chosen the life of a wandering ascetic monk.⁵⁹ They exhibit qualities of compassion, “self-control,” and a “tranquil” body-mind-sense complex which are external manifestations of an internalized, transformed desire that is flipped from the external world of sense objects to an internal desire, a drive to know the Self (US 1.3).⁶⁰ Indeed, as it is said in the Bṛhadāraṇya Upaniṣad 4.4.5:

You are what your deep, driving desire is.
As your desire is, so is your will.
As your will is, so is our deed.
As your deed is, so is your destiny.⁶¹

The world-famous comparative religion scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000) argues that the Sanskrit term *śraddhā*, often translated as “faith” in modern times, has been pointed out by “scrupulous and sensitive scholars” *not* to have conveyed its exact Sanskrit meaning in English.⁶² For one, *śraddhā* is not belief, and although Sanskrit contains words that can convey the English meaning of “belief,” from a Hindu theo/alogical perspective, the focus is not on belief but on knowledge.⁶³ Knowing, Smith beautifully articulates is not:

“[K]nowing that” . . . , but an immediate knowing of: a direct knowledge of reality with a capital R, a transcendental knowledge of ultimate truth (Brahman). *Such knowledge should not be said to lead to salvation as much as to constitute salvation.* It not merely transcends but negates lower truths of discursive reasoning and propositional

58 Jagadānanda, *Upadeśasāhasrī*, 2.

59 Jagadānanda, *Upadeśasāhasrī*, 2.

60 Jagadānanda, *Upadeśasāhasrī*, 3, 206–207. I borrow the term “body-mind-sense complex” from Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, world renowned 20th Century saint, mystic, and scholar of Advaita Vedanta who established the Arsha Vidya Gurulukam. Pujya Swamiji used the term “body-mind-sense complex” to describe the seamless, non-hierarchical self.

61 Eknath Easwaran and Michael N. Nagger, *The Upanishads: The Classics of Indian Spirituality* (Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 1987), 67.

62 Wilfred Cantrell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them* (One World Publications, 1979), 60. Smith mentions several terms that may be correlated to the Western category of faith such as *viśvāsa*, *āstikya*, *prapatti*, *āstha*, *bhāva*, *niṣṭhā*.

63 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 54.

knowledge. In this monistic, ecstatic knowing, knower and known are fused (rather are no longer falsely separated) to say nothing of there being left far behind the subject-predicate analysis of our piecemeal objective knowledge of disparate parts of the workaday world. *This supreme kind of knowledge is a far cry from “belief,” and perhaps no one has ever thought of translating it so.*⁶⁴

Śraddhā, in its essence, is not equivalent to belief. Here, I explore a general concept of *śraddhā* while examining *śraddhā* through a Śāṅkaran lens because Śāṅkara remains the most influential Hindu systematic theologian from the classical period. The Sanskrit term *śraddhā* is a compound of two words: *Śrat*, meaning “truth, faithfulness,” and *dha*, meaning “to place.” The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad shows that faith is established in the heart and becomes the basis of making sacrificial offerings.

“On what is the sacrifice founded?”

“On the sacrificial gift.”

“On what is the sacrificial gift founded?”

“On faith, for a man gives a sacrificial gift only when he has faith. So the sacrificial gift is founded on faith.”

“On what is faith founded?”

“On the heart, for one recognizes faith with the heart. So faith is founded on the heart” (BU 3.9.26).⁶⁵

However, the term *śraddhā* does not define the specific object upon which one places one’s heart, thereby challenging the Western tendency to conceptualize faith in terms of belief in a particular object.⁶⁶ As noted by Smith, *śraddhā* encompasses a range of meanings, including “ritual *śraddhā*, intellectual *śraddhā*, moral *śraddhā*, and so on.”⁶⁷ This suggests that *śraddhā* reflects a broader “attitude or an initial act” that enables individuals to engage in different relational contexts with different religious objects.⁶⁸ Thus, Smith notes, *śraddhā* lends itself to various contexts and Hindu schools, and what unites them is the human capacity to “respond, involve and engage.”⁶⁹

64 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 54–55, emphasis mine.

65 BU refers to *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. See, Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 99.

66 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 61.

67 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 61.

68 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 62.

69 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 61–62.

He further asserts that the Hindu religious life, no matter its form, “begins with faith, and faith, in its turn, is one’s finding within that life (one’s being found by) something to which one gives one’s heart.”⁷⁰

The absence of *śraddhā* is not disbelief. Instead, it is a state characterized by hesitation, irresolution, and an “ego-diffused” attitude.⁷¹ *Aśraddhā* (the opposite of faith) reflects a lack of engagement, manifesting in actions performed with reluctance, murmuring, or complaints.⁷² It suggests a lack of care, which renders rituals, moral actions, or truth claims futile and unworthy of engagement.

Smith also identifies the other dimensions of *śraddhā*, such as desire, confidence, trust, and its close link with bhakti (devotion), where the two terms overlap, highlighting the deep connection between faith and devotional love.⁷³ These dimensions underscore the multifaceted nature of *śraddhā*, which has both an adverbial or adjectival quality—an intrinsic way of engaging with the world.⁷⁴

Śraddhā, then, denotes a way of doing things in the religious life: the way a ritualist performs a rite, the way a moralist carries out an obligation or a set of injunctions, the way one listens to the Gītā, the way an intellectualist relates his mind and himself to the truth, the way a bhakti-devotee worships, and so on.⁷⁵

These observations are broad general comments related to *śraddhā*. Seshagiri Rao asserts that in the Brahmaṇas, *śraddhā* may be broadly characterized as “ritualistic,” in the Upaniṣads as “gnostic,” and in the Bhagavad Gītā “devotional.”⁷⁶

Śāṅkara, in his works, uses the term *āstikyabuddhi* for faith.⁷⁷ *Āstikyabuddhi* is a compound of two Sanskrit words: *Asti*, meaning “is” or “it is,” and *buddhi*, meaning “awareness, perception, and discernment.”⁷⁸ The term *asti* and its opposite, *nasti* (it is not), denotes a person’s acceptance or rejection of

70 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 62.

71 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 63, 234.

72 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 64.

73 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 64.

74 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 64.

75 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 64.

76 Seshagiri Rao, “*The Concept of Śraddha*,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1966), 288.

77 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 59.

78 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 58–59.

the authority of the Vedas.⁷⁹ The *astika* affirms the existence of a reality beyond mere appearances, a profound truth that transcends the immediate, the tangible, and the mundane, as reported by sages.⁸⁰ The *nāstika*, on the other hand, either rejects such a reality or has a different understanding of ultimate reality than what is described in the Vedas. The root meaning of the term *buddhi* is “to be awake.” Thus, *āstikyabuddhi* is “awareness to transcendence—an awareness that leads to “resolve, decision, and engagement.”⁸¹

The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, *Crest-Jewel of Discernment*, which is traditionally but wrongly attributed to Śaṅkara, outlines six key qualities for renunciants on their path to liberation: *śama* (tranquility), *dama* (self-control), *uparati* (renunciation), *titikṣā* (endurance), *śraddhā*, and *samādhāna* (intellectual alertness) (VC 22–26).⁸² In this text, faith is defined as: “Acceptance by firm judgment of the mind as true of what the scriptures and the Guru instruct, is called by the sages *śraddhā* or faith, by means of which the Reality is perceived.”⁸³ Acceptance, as discussed here, refers to discerning judgment and should not be mistaken for blind acceptance. It implies that the mind must reach a “perfect state of assured reliance on the truth of instructions received, without which a whole-hearted, one-pointed practice of those instructions is not possible.”⁸⁴

In his commentary on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Śaṅkara defines *śraddhā* as “judgment that affirms Vedic teachings with regard to ritual action towards invisible ends and with regard to deities and so on. *Āśraddhā* is a judgment contrary to this” (BU 1.5.3) ⁸⁵ “*Śraddhā* is a feeling of respect for the object of one’s meditation; it is a judgment that affirms Vedic teachings” and “*Śraddhā* is a calmness of mind which must precede the effort to accomplish any of the aims of man [human]; it is a judgment that affirms Vedic teachings.”⁸⁶ In all three verses, we see *śraddhā* functions as a judgment, a

79 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 58–59.

80 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 58.

81 Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 58–59.

82 Madhavananda, *Vivekachudamani of Sri Shankaracharya*, 9–11.

83 Madhavananda, *Vivekachudamani of Sri Shankaracharya*, 10.

84 Madhavananda, *Vivekachudamani of Sri Shankaracharya*, 10.

85 Swami Madhavananda, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad: With the Commentary of Shankaracharya* (Advaita Ashrama, 1950), 214–215; Yoshitsugu Sawai, “The Nature of Faith in the Śaṅkaran Vedānta Tradition,” *Numen* 34, no. 1 (June 1987): 18–44.

86 Sawai, “The Nature of Faith in the Śaṅkaran Vedānta Tradition,” 21.

reasoned trust that recognizes the authority and reliability of the Vedic teachings and the spiritual teacher.

The *Praśna Upaniṣad*, which derives its name from the six questions (*praśna*) posed by six disciples to the sage Pippalāda, the triad of *tapas* (austerity), *brahmacarya* (the disciplines associated with those who are dedicated to *brahman*), and *śraddhā* (reverence) feature in the dialogues between the teacher and his disciples (1.2, 1.10, 1.15, 5.3).⁸⁷ These virtues are underscored as essential qualifications and prerequisites for pupils seeking higher knowledge and spiritual understanding.⁸⁸ In the opening verses of the *Praśna Upaniṣad*, six disciples—already steadfast and established in *saguṇa brahman*, *brahman* with form, approach the sage in a manner that is humble and fitting, with sacrificial fuel (*samit*) in hand, signifying their acceptance of the teacher’s guidance and their willingness to serve him (1.1).⁸⁹ The seer responds to the aspirants, “Live here for another year practicing austerity, chastity, and faith. Ask all the questions you want, and, if I know, I will answer them all” (PU 1.2).⁹⁰

In his commentary (*bhāṣya*), Śaṅkara notes the seer’s acknowledgment of the aspirant’s prior practice of austerities (*tapas*) but instructs them to remain for another year, focusing on *brahmacarya* and faith, following which they could ask questions. The Gurus’s response, “If we know, we shall, indeed, explain all to you,” indicates his dual virtues of knowledge and humility—while stressing that disciples should cultivate faith and self-control before grasping higher knowledge.⁹¹ From a Śaṅkara standpoint, disciples cannot fully comprehend the teachers’ teachings or the Vedic scriptures without faith.

The *Praśna Upaniṣad* further differentiates between two paths of liberation. Those seeking liberation through austerity, self-control, faith, and knowledge follow the northern route, which leads to immortality and fearlessness, which is the path of the sun (PU 1.9–1.10).⁹² In contrast, the southern route associated with the moon involves karma and the performance of “sacrificial and pious acts,” ultimately returning individuals to the cycle of rebirth.⁹³ Even mighty sages desiring children take the

87 Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, 456.

88 Swami Nikhilandanda, *The Upanishads: Śvetāśvatara, Praśna, and Māndūkya with Gaudapāda’s Kārikā* (Harper & Brothers, 1952), 149.

89 Nikhilandanda, *The Upanishads*, 153.

90 PU refers to *Praśna Upaniṣad*. See, Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, 459.

91 Nikhilandanda, *The Upanishads*, 154.

92 Nikhilandanda, *The Upanishads*, 158–159.

93 Nikhilandanda, *The Upanishads*, 158–159.

southern route.⁹⁴ Moreover, those naturally inclined toward austerity, self-control, and faith attain a level of greatness on Earth due to their meditation on the first phoneme of the mantra Om, which is both the higher and lower *brahman* in their past lives (PU 5.3).⁹⁵ This illustrates that although reverential faith precedes the pursuit of truth, faith is not abandoned in favor of intellectual knowledge; instead, faith persists through one's spiritual practice, leading to liberation.

Faith is indispensable for those pursuing liberative knowledge. The Bhagavad Gītā 4.39 states, "The faith-filled [yogin] intent on That, [with] senses restrained, attains knowledge. Having attained knowledge, he [s/he/they] will quickly attain supreme peace."⁹⁶ One who is possessed of *śraddhā*, i.e., faithful, obtains liberation. Liberation, however, is not incompatible with reason and logic. According to the Śāṅkaran framework, the quest for liberation (*mokṣa*) is grounded in a rational process, where sound reasoning and logical inquiry are used to discover Ultimate Reality. The teachings of the scriptures serve as a foundation for this process, which is led by the Guru's wisdom. Rather than being obstacles, reason and logic are essential tools for dispelling ignorance and revealing the true nature of the self, which is identical to *brahman*. However, their role is limited since reason cannot establish the existence of *brahman*.⁹⁷ At the most, reason can reflect upon, clarify, and defend what is already known through revelation. Although *brahman* exists independently of the Upaniṣads, and is known primarily and decisively through Vedic revelation, reason is secondary and supportive.⁹⁸ This position aligns with the Mīmāṃsikas in its critique of inductive proofs of *brahman*'s existence and its resistance to the Nyāyayikas claims that reason alone can certify that *brahman* exists.⁹⁹

This viewpoint is articulated in Bādarāyaṇa's Uttara Mīmāṃsā Sūtras (1.1.2), which Vedāntins interpret not as endorsing induction but as subordinating it to scripture.¹⁰⁰ Śāṅkara makes this explicit by rejecting the Nyāya argument that the ordered nature of the world permits a rational inference to a world-maker. Instead, he insists that "the realization of Brahman is achieved only by deliberation on the [Vedic and Upanisadic]

94 Nikhilandanda, *The Upanishads*, 158–159.

95 Nikhilandanda, *The Upanishads*, 188–189.

96 Georg Feuerstein and Brenda Feuerstein, *The Bhagavad-Gītā: A New Translation* (Shambhala Publications, Inc, 2011), 145.

97 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*.

98 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 52.

99 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 52.

100 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 52.

texts and their meanings and not by other means of knowledge, such as induction.”¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, the rationality of religious knowledge is not denied. Once *brahman* is known through the Upaniṣads, reasoning has a legitimate role in that it can eliminate misconceptions, reinforce scriptural teachings, and expand understanding in ways that do not contradict revelation.¹⁰² Religious truth is therefore not discovered by reason and supplemented by scripture, but found in scripture and confirmed by reason.¹⁰³

Crucially, knowledge of *brahman* in Vedānta is not merely theoretical but transformative and liberative and “ought not be confused with a merely correct induction.”¹⁰⁴ For this reason, independent reasoning is not encouraged as it might falsely suggest certainty about *brahman* apart from *śraddhā* and textual commitment.¹⁰⁵ Arguments “put forward by intellectuals such as logicians” remain perpetually open to debate and cannot provide the certainty required for liberation.¹⁰⁶ Thus, a careful balance is maintained, in that while scripture alone is the authoritative source of certain knowledge of *brahman*, reason—excerpted within a disciplined exegetical framework plays an indispensable but subordinate role. Reason operates properly only within scripturally formed thinking and cannot function as a universal, autonomous bridge to religious truth.¹⁰⁷ *Brahman* is known not outside the texts, but through and after them, in the act of informed, reflective reading guided by tradition.¹⁰⁸

Śaṅkara’s *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* states: “Thus, the seeker of the Supreme Reality, the *Ātman*, must engage in reasoning, after first approaching a Guru who is the supreme knower of Brahman, a veritable ocean of compassion” (VC 6–7).¹⁰⁹ This emphasizes the importance of reasoning and logic in the Śaṅkaran framework as well as the need for the wise counsel of a knowledgeable and compassionate Guru. The Śaṅkaran epistemological framework consists of three core components: the subject or an agent of knowledge (*pramātṛ*), the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), and the object of knowledge (*prameya*).¹¹⁰ Within this framework, six valid means of knowing,

101 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 52.

102 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 54.

103 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 54.

104 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 55.

105 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 55.

106 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 56.

107 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 56–57.

108 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 57.

109 Madhavananda, *Vivekachudamani of Sri Shankaracharya*, 6–7.

110 Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi, *The Essential Vedanta: A New Source Book of Advaita*

or *pramāṇas*, are recognized: *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (comparison), *anupalabdhi* (non-cognition), *arthāpatti* (postulation), *śabda* (verbal testimony).¹¹¹ Each of these *pramāṇas* is essential to understanding the essence of *brahman* or the Self, allowing the seeker to approach this knowledge with the highest reverence.

A *pramāṇa* is a valid means of knowledge, providing well-established, non-negatable knowledge.¹¹² Through *pramāṇas*, one validates what one knows by removing false assumptions or misconceptions that lack a solid basis. *Pramāṇas* serve as the proof of valid knowledge. The six valid means of knowing are as follows:

1. *Pratyakṣa*: This is the primary means of knowing through perception. Humans have five sensory organs (hearing, tasting, seeing, smelling, and touching) by which they perceive reality.¹¹³ This *pramāṇa* is further divided into *sākṣiṇ pratyakṣa*, or “witness perception,” which involves an inward sense of reality, such as the perception of time, space, or even emotions like pain and pleasure. For Śaṅkara, class, quality, and action are characteristics of objects that can be apprehended through sensory perception (Ke UP Bh 1.3).¹¹⁴ However, since *brahman* has no attributes, so it is neither a class nor has qualities, so is beyond the reach of the senses. *Brahman* is not an object to be cognized with the five senses but is perception itself—the substratum on which cognition is based, hence the cognizer of all experiences. According to Śaṅkara, this makes *brahman* difficult to prove through sensory evidence. He anticipates that some may question the existence of *brahman* but responds by emphasizing the authority of traditional scriptures (*āgama*), which, he argues, provide a more suitable and trustworthy means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) in such matters.¹¹⁵
2. *Anumāna*: Inference, a mediate form of knowledge, is based on logical reasoning from observed phenomena.¹¹⁶ For example, one might infer that it has rained because the road is wet. *Anumāna* relies on what is known as “universal concomitance” (*vyāpti*), which means that two

Vedanta (World Wisdom, Inc., 2004), 396.

111 Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedanta*, 397.

112 Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedanta*, 371.

113 Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedanta*, 4.

114 Ke UP Bh. refers to *Kena Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*. See, J.G. Suthren Hirst, *Samkara's Advaita Vedanta: A Way of Teaching* (Routledge, 2005), 50.

115 Hirst, *Samkara's Advaita Vedanta*, 50.

116 Hirst, *Samkara's Advaita Vedanta*, 50.

phenomena are observed to occur together consistently.¹¹⁷ A stock example is the coexistence of smoke and fire, which allows one to infer the presence of fire from the observation of smoke. Regarding *brahman*, this *pramāṇa* also falls short since it inherently depends on sense perception and empirical evidence. Since *bhahman* is not an object, it transcends sensory experiences and cannot be inferred through sensory data.

3. *Arthāpatti*: Postulation or presumption involves multi-step reasoning. For example, if Devadutta is observed not eating during the day but is found to be increasing in weight when put on a weighing scale, one may postulate that he must be eating at night.
4. *Upamāna*: This is the method of knowledge gained through analogy or comparison. When confronted with something unknown, we compare it to something familiar to make sense of it. However, there is not anything in class, quality, or action that may be compared or analogized with *brahman*.
5. *Anupalabdhi*: Non-cognition, or the apprehension of absence, is the knowledge of non-existence through an object's non-perception. For example, a jar's absence is implied if it is not visible in a particular area. However, it is crucial to note that this is not about absolute absence but about the absence of a particular object in a given context. For instance, one may know that a flower does not exist in one's hand, though the concept or image of the flower remains in one's mind.
6. *Śabda*: Verbal testimony, whether oral or written, is a valid means of knowledge when it comes from an authentic and trustworthy source. The teachings of the *śruti* (Vedic scriptures) and *smṛti* (such as the Puraṇas and Itihāsas) are considered valid, provided they align with the *śruti*. According to Śaṅkara, the perfect knowledge of *brahman*, the objective reality in its true nature, can only be obtained through the Upaniṣads.

Each *pramāṇa* is self-sufficient in its own domain, and no *pramāṇa* can negate or displace another. Swamini Svātmanvidyananda Saraswati, a world-renowned Vedāntist from the Śāṅkaran lineage, argues that the proof of each *pramāṇa* lies in its operation. Just as the proof of a successful eye surgery

117 Hirst, *Samkara's Advaita Vedanta*, 50.

is evidenced by the act of seeing, so also the proof of each *pramāṇa* is evident in its application. Validation of each *pramāṇa* requires engaging, practicing, and observing its operation. Yet, each *pramāṇa* is insufficient to validate *brahman*.

[T]here are six *pramāṇas*;
they relate to something that is called /the domain/
of phenomenal practice, and cannot be applied to *ātman* [*brahman*]
(SSS 12.85–86).¹¹⁸

Then how can one know *brahman*? Scriptures (*śruti* texts) serve as an efficient *pramāṇa* a legitimate source of knowledge about *brahman*. The *śruti* texts are reliable and are supported by the doctrine of *apauruṣeyatva*. As per this doctrine, the Upaniṣads are infallible because they are eternal without human or divine authorship.¹¹⁹ Their effectiveness stems from their capacity to offer liberation to individuals. As such, scriptures function as an effective *pramāṇa*—a valid means of knowledge with its unique domain. Śaṅkara notes that dismissing scripture as false merely because it discusses phenomena beyond sense perception or inference is unjustifiably constraining what can be known.¹²⁰ It entails dismissing a legitimate *pramāṇa* and ignoring its demonstrated outcomes. However, Śaṅkara, recognizes that every *pramāṇa*, including scriptural testimony functions, within a distinct domain. For instance, scriptures would lack authority, if it said that fire is cold because fire’s nature as being hot is known and understood by sense perception.¹²¹ Scripture cannot contradict the legitimate roles of sense perception and inference within their domains. Nevertheless, since the proper subject of scripture is *brahman*, the ultimate source of all existence, scripture provides a context within which sense perception, inference, and even itself function. Thus far, I have examined the role of faith, reason and logic within the schema of liberation. I now briefly discuss liberation from Śaṅkara’s standpoint.

Śaṅkara bravely proposed that no human action, including the rituals prescribed by the Vedas can lead one to liberation. Liberation is not dependent on *doing* but on *knowing*. J.G. Suthren Hirst observes that, “(i) Action, for Śaṅkara, involves option, knowledge does not; (ii) knowledge of *brahman* is not knowledge of an object but the state in which all objectivizing

118 SSS is an abbreviation of *Sarva Siddhānta Saṅgrahaḥ*. See, M. Rangacarya, *Sarvasiddhantasahgraha* (Madras, India: 1909).

119 Hirst, *Samkara’s Advaita Vedanta*, 51.

120 Hirst, *Samkara’s Advaita Vedanta*, 52.

121 Hirst, *Samkara’s Advaita Vedanta*, 52.

superimpositions have been removed.”¹²² Liberation entails knowing oneself as non-different from *brahman*. *Brahman* is being, consciousness, infinity (*sat-cit-ānanda*), and liberation entails the removal of “the world of name, form and action, the world of means and ends, [and] the world of ritual.”¹²³ Śaṅkara argues that liberation is achievable in this life, as one who realizes the self as *brahman*. This realization cannot be negated by future knowledge. For such individuals, grief and delusion dissolve. The paradox in this tradition is that the seeker is simultaneously the sought, the problem and the solution. One does not need to search for the solution outside; rather, the solution lies within oneself. The realization of *brahman* is not an external acquisition but an internal recognition of one’s true nature as *sat-cit-ānanda*.

Convergences and Divergences

In the writings of Anselm and Śaṅkara, faith serves as a prerequisite for theological exploration based on the scriptures of their respective traditions. Both figures suggest a faith-filled commitment to the scriptural repertoire handed down by the tradition. In both works, faith initiates and works actively in conjunction with reason, logic, and scriptural authority. The interplay of faith and reason leads to liberation, in the case of Śaṅkara and in the case of Anselm, into deeper dogmatic truths, as established by the Church. Rather than advocating for a passive acceptance of Christian dogmas, Anselm invites believers to use logical inquiry to deepen their faith, reinforcing that faith and reason are not antithetical but complementary, highlighting a rationally coherent theological framework. While Anselm’s notion of faith invites rational reflection apart from scriptures, Śaṅkara’s *śraddhā* entails a deep inquiry into the true nature of the self that is based on philosophical and rational inquiry enshrined in scriptures. The pursuit of liberation coupled with *śraddhā*—a trust in the teachings of the scriptures and the guru, not as blind belief but as reasoned conviction leads to the dispelling of ignorance (*avidyā*). Śaṅkara’s epistemology, structured around the six *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge), highlights the limitations of sensory, inferential cognition, and rationality in grasping the ultimate reality, positioning *śabda* (scriptural testimony) as the most authoritative means for knowing *brahman*.

Both Anselm and Śaṅkara seek logical proofs to understand the nature of God and Ultimate Reality. Both theologians imply that faith has

122 Hirst, *Samkara’s Advaita Vedanta*, 40.

123 Hirst, *Samkara’s Advaita Vedanta*, 140.

intellectual, experiential, and transformative dimensions. Both theologians understand the limitations of reason in grasping divine truths and mysteries while granting their scriptural traditions higher authority. While Śaṅkara upholds scriptural testimony and the means of knowledge delineated in them (*pramāṇas*) as the most authoritative means to know *brahman*, Anselm boldly steps outside of canonical authority to seek rational proof for divine truths. While Anselm's concept of faith is primarily theologically linked to belief in God's existence and doctrines of the Church, Śaṅkara's *śraddhā* is an attitude of receptivity and not doctrinal assent. Śaṅkara's concept of faith, as per world renowned scholar-practitioner of Advaita Vedānta Swamini Svatmavidyananda Saraswati, may be called "faith pending understanding."¹²⁴

Implications for Comparative Theology

Anselm's integration of faith and reason raises critical questions. His emphasis on faith as the starting point for theological exploration presupposes Christian belief, potentially restricting its applicability in interfaith, comparative theological engagements, or secular discourse. One could contend that this method runs the risk of circular reasoning, wherein faith validates reason, which in turn reinforces faith, thereby restraining one from going beyond the theological limits of one's tradition. Furthermore, Anselm's model does not fully address the epistemological tension between reason and revelation in understanding divine mysteries. There is also an emphasis on rationality to prove divine truths. Nevertheless, his contributions significantly influenced medieval scholasticism, shaping theological discussions far beyond his era, and his framework of faith and reason is still being used for interreligious and comparative theological engagements.

On the other hand, Śaṅkara's model of faith and reason challenges conventional Western theological paradigms not just by opposing duality with non-duality, but by reconfiguring the relationship between knowing, being, and liberation. For Śaṅkara, knowledge is not an instrument leading to liberation, but is the essence of liberation itself. For Anselm, faith precedes and guides reason, while reason strives to render intelligible what has already been affirmed through doctrinal assent. Even at its most high, reason remains confined within a subject-object epistemology in which God is the object of belief and rational inquiry. As a result, knowledge of God is

124 Swamini Svatmavidyananda Saraswati, *Vedānta Satsaṅgh* (India, 2019).

mediated through propositions, concepts, and the requirements of logical coherence.

Śaṅkara's challenges to this model lie in his non-dual epistemology. In Advaita Vedānta, the knower (*pramāṭr*), the means of knowing (*pramāṇa*), and the object known (*prameya*) ultimately converge in the realization of *brahman*. No matter how rigorously one employs a valid means of knowledge—perception, inference, comparison, postulation, or testimony—*brahman*, being without attributes, class, or qualification (*nirguṇa*), cannot be objectified. Hence, liberation cannot be achieved through conceptual mastery, rational demonstration, or doctrinal assent. Faith and reason function as provisional and preparatory supports, both of which are finally sublated in liberating knowledge (*mokṣa*), understood as the recognition of *brahman* as one's own true nature.

This epistemological shift exposes a limitation in Anselm's approach to faith. Although Anselm acknowledges the limits of reason and emphasizes humility before divine mystery, faith remains bound to belief and mediated understanding. Śaṅkara avoids this limitation by relocating the locus of truth from external assent to inward realization. The truth of *brahman* is simultaneously the truth of the self that exists independently of scripture, even though it is validated by the guru and communally supported through practices such as chanting and meditation. These supports do not function authoritatively in the sense of enforcing belief; instead, they cultivate what may be described as "receptivity."

Śaṅkara's concept of *śraddhā* is an attitude of receptivity rather than faith in propositional beliefs. It is a disciplined, oriented openness that allows ignorance (*avidyā*) to fall away, which I argue is a broader understanding of faith that integrates reason, experience, and scriptural engagement. Receptivity is central to Śaṅkara's alternative model. Whereas Anselm's reason actively seeks understanding within the bounds set by faith, Śaṅkara emphasizes a mode of knowing that culminates not in intellectual grasping but in receptive recognition. Liberation occurs not through the accumulation of theological propositions but through the removal of ignorance that obscures what is already present. This receptive orientation enables Śaṅkara to avoid the exclusivity implicit in doctrinal assent while preserving the integrity of religious tradition and practice. This receptivity culminates in the knowledge of *brahman*, which is an expansive sense of "I," a truth that extends beyond its texts, a truth that is reasonable, world-encompassing, and open to inquiry. This truth is the "ultimate unity" of all reality, a unity that

transcends socio-political, historical, religious, and institutional boundaries.¹²⁵

It is precisely here that a close reading of Śaṅkara enriches Hindu-Christian dialogue. Because *brahman* is fully present in all phenomena and in all sentient beings without discrimination, transcending boundaries, the epistemological model Śaṅkara articulates is universal rather than confessional. Although the path is historically and socially mediated through the Vedas, the guru-disciple relationship, and communal life, the goal of liberation is not particularized. Both the modes of knowing and the goal of liberation, as revealed by the Vedas, remain available to all, irrespective of religious affiliation.

In contrast to Anselm's framework, which ultimately presupposes ecclesial authority and doctrinal belief, Śaṅkara offers what I would like to describe as a naturally occurring cosmological theology grounded in shared human capacities for receptivity, self-knowledge, and transformation. In this way, Śaṅkara's non-dual paradigm challenges Western theological assumptions by dissolving the dualism between faith and knowledge and proposing a universal epistemological vision in which liberation is realized—not imposed—through transformative self-recognition.

Given that CT, as it is often practiced today, is disconnected from meditative discipline and has risked becoming a largely intellectual exercise, the following point cannot be emphasized strongly enough. In both Anselm and Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, devotional reflection constitutes the setting in which rational and logical argumentation properly unfolds. For Anselm, reading is a communal contemplative practice in which reasoning functions as a shared good. His texts invite the reader, especially the Benedictine confrere, into a common rational dynamic, one that deepens faith through disciplined contemplation. Meditative reading is thus not ancillary to theological reasoning but its very condition, enabling participation in a shared movement of faith seeking understanding.

Similarly, for Śaṅkara, critical enquiry is neither a detached intellectual exercise nor a form of speculative abstraction. Rather, it is ordered toward the establishment of a unitive realization of *brahman*. This process is the pedagogical triad of *śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana*, articulated in Vedic Scriptures. *Śravaṇa*, the attentive hearing of scriptural teaching, aided by a guru and sustained through dialogical engagement; *manana*, the reflective and critical contemplation of what has been heard; and *nididhyāsana*, the

125 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 19.

realization achieved through meditation of truths.¹²⁶ In both traditions, scriptures are understood within the context of meditative reading, in which rational reflection emerges, unfolds, and blossoms. Far from opposing reason and contemplation, Anselm and Śaṅkara each model a mode of reading in which intellect and devotion mutually intensify, directing the seeker/adept toward their respective soteriological ends. Ultimately, I think, there is no hierarchy of goals, yet one does not fail to notice that Śaṅkara's view resonates with Christian mystical traditions, where faith is seen as transformative knowledge rather than mere assent to doctrines. By engaging Śaṅkara's thought, comparative theology can explore alternative paradigms of faith that move beyond Western epistemic frameworks, fostering a richer interreligious dialogue between people and traditions.

Dr. Pravina Rodrigues is Assistant Professor at Starr King School for the Ministry in California, USA. She is Editor-in-Chief of Springer's Journal of Dharma Studies and Co-Chair of the Dharma Unit of the American Academy of Religion-Western Region. Her research interests include decolonial studies, Hindu-Christian comparative theology, interreligious dialogue, and Hindu ritual and Hindu Goddess theologies.



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126 William M. Indich, *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd, 1995), 10–11.